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The Fratellis

“Flathead”

[Universal / Island ; 2007]

★

If you think post-Libertines Britrock reached its nadir with Razorlight, be grateful you've yet to hear the contributions of the Fratellis. To hear "Flathead" (easier now that it's featured in the latest iPod commercials) is to discover new depths. No victory is too easy for Barry, Jon, and Mince. (Yes, Mince.) They get loaded. They have a good time with girls apparently all too willing to oblige ("Hers is a tonic and mine is a gin"). And for a soundtrack, well... they offer a mess of ba-da-bas, Kooks-y jangle, and Borrell tonsillitis. The track is triumphant without any genuine triumph-- miles from the hard-won pleasures of "Time for Heroes" and "Don't Look Back Into the Sun." In fact, the celebratory tone is so at odds with the emptiness that lingers at song's end, you can only hope they really are as ignorant as they seem. We should all be so lucky.

Video: The Frattelis: Flathead

Posted by Jon Garrett in indie on Fri: 01-12-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Horizontal-dotbar-2col

Loney, Dear

“I Am John”

[Sub Pop; 2007]

★★★

It's songs like this (and furniture brands like Ikea) that make us think everything from Sweden is adorable and fragile. Loney, Dear, like close companions Peter Bjorn and John, have a symmetrical attention to detail that makes each song crisp, but just a little hard to touch.

So tiny and delicate you could carry it in cupped hands, "I Am John" is a sweet introduction to Loney, Dear and their upcoming Sub Pop debut, *Loney, Noir*. Everything is on the quiet: brushed drumbeats, glockenspiel tings, just a touch of farty, under-the-table bass. "Johnny and I we got lost tonight/ We got carried away," sings Loney, Dear's Emil Svanängen, a man who sounds as if he's never gotten carried away a night in his life (or has a friend named Johnny). But "I Am John" develops stronger legs three-quarters of the way through, when Svanängen piles on layers and layers of voices, until a mini-chorus backs the opening line into believability.

MP3: Loney, Dear: I Am John

Posted by Jessica Suarez in indie on Fri: 01-12-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Love of Diagrams
“No Way Out”
[Matador; 2007]
★★★★

Some records sound timeless by sounding dated. This first offering from the forthcoming Matador debut by Melbourne-based noisemakers Love of Diagrams first appeared on the Australian band's 2003 EP, *The Target Is You*. But if this track wasn't recorded between '77 and '81, it could have been recorded any year after.

Not to say that "No Way Out" is imitative-- the band sounds like they're trying to force their way out of the song. The prickly guitar lines feel their way down dark hallways, stumbling over furniture and tripping over floorboards. The boy/girl vocals (each line is sung by bassist Luke Horton, then repeated by guitarist Antonia Sellbach) are tentative, unsteady, and flat as hell, but still manage moments of expression: "I got a weak heart," Horton uptones, leading Sellbach to respond in a dead, defeated drone before she suddenly shouts "I can, I can, I can!" like she's just found the doorknob.

- **MP3: Love of Diagrams**: No Way Out
- **Video: Love of Diagrams**: No Way Out

Posted by Jessica Suarez in indie on Fri: 01-12-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah
“Love Song No. 7”
[self-released; 2007]
★★★½

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah's self-released second album, *Some Loud Thunder*, comes out January 30, but so far there's been little news surrounding its release: In early October, the band revealed to Pitchfork that they'd been recording with renowned producer Dave Fridmann, then waited until just before Christmas to release two free MP3s. A month later, the band seems to be (perhaps intentionally) keeping a lower profile.

"Love Song No. 7", one of the two MP3s released in support of the new album, is markedly more focused on sound and atmosphere than the tight, concise pop songs of their debut. It's also their moodiest track to date. Centering around a doleful piano, crooning, backwards accordion, and, between instrumental passages, frontman Alec Ounsworth's reedy, watery vocals, "Love Song No. 7" definitely makes Fridmann's presence known. The track should also help listeners tune out the David Byrne and Gordon Gano comparisons-- here, Ounsworth's stretched, nasally vowels and undulations sound more like Supertramp's Roger Hodgson. (Okay, take that how you will.)

The mood grows eerier as the song's repetitions become increasingly determined: the piano mediates on the same chords, and a sickly whistle sounds the melody in the background. As a lead single, it's an unexpected choice, but

a fitting one for a band for whom presentation has never been a strong suit: I mean, they did call themselves Clap Your Hands Say Yeah.

MP3: Clap Your Hands Say Yeah: Love Song No. 7
Posted by Jessica Suarez on Thu: 01-11-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Clipse
“Mr. Me Too (Z.A.K. remix)”
[2006]
★★★★½
"Mr. Me Too"'s original beat is just too much of a "Drop It Like It's Hot" retread to be truly great, but the Thornton brothers' taunts do become kind of funny when Pharrell explains "why I call you 'Me Too."" The explanation is necessary, of course, but hearing it more than once is not, so enterprising **Soul Sides** reader Z.A.K. is wise to forgo the Neptunes' verses entirely on this remix, which lays Clipse's vocals over the music of Lee Fields' "Honey Dove".

The juxtaposition of the gently strummed guitar, laid-back horns, and slow-motion strings of Field's track makes Pharrell's verses even more irrelevant, as Z.A.K. perfectly distills the flaunted prosperity of the song's lyrics into a mood that permeates the entire track. This is yacht rap, the sound of Clipse contented and reaping the spoils. Where the original worked hard to play up the envy of others, the remix actually makes Malice and Pusha T *sound* enviable, like they're gonna have a few Tom Collinses and hit the golf course after the studio. You wouldn't have thought the Neptunes needed a lesson in keeping things simple, but Z.A.K. is more effective in three minutes than Williams and Hugo are in nearly four.

MP3: Clipse: Mr. Me Too (Z.A.K. remix)
Posted by Dave Maher in hip hop on Thu: 01-11-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Marcin Czubala
“Super Constellation”
[Mobilee; 2007]
★★★½
Marcin Czubala may be a relatively new face in techno, but his career in classical music goes back to the early 90s and even includes a performance with the legendary Krysztof Penderecki. For Berlin-based Mobilee's first release of 07, Czibula brings two cuts of minimal techno that seldom allow melody to rear its head. "Super Conny" is the pick of the two, with buzzing synths and a stuttering electro flavor. "Starliner" is housier and extremely close to a standard Mobilee style, which we can forgive them for given that it's still only January. A good, if not mindblowing 12".

Stream: Marcin Czubala: Super Constellation
Posted by Ronan Fitzgerald in electronic on Thu: 01-11-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

!!!
“Heart of Hearts”
[Warp; 2007]
★★★★½

!!!'s prodigiously hyphenated genre exercises-- how does "electro-acoustic no-wave post-disco-funk" suit you?-- have always been audacious, if spotty. "Heart of Hearts", though, distills everything good about !!! (relentless propulsion, lean syncopation, and dynamic convulsions) into a mighty six-minute tsunami that cascades in perpetuity. Darkly glittering scraps of guitar and concussive noises gather before quickly bursting into a wiry

disco pulse, arcing between chewy bass and smacking drums. The scatty, svelte vocals are all vapid dance-floor solidarity, fleshing out the glass-brick funk.

Having established an impregnable architecture, !!! get down to the fine details: A mean, circuit-bent-sounding squelch livens up the chorus; a panting refrain of "heart of" that suddenly sounds like a libidinous "harder"; a false ending and subsequent explosion of whooshing guitar trails and roars, pierced by simmering percussion and lockstep bass. High-wire tension, telegraphic urgency, twisting and braiding: This one's an unstoppable juggernaut.

Posted by Brian Howe in dance on Wed: 01-10-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lee Jones and Prins Thomas
“There Comes a Time”
[Aus Music; 2007]
★★★★★

UK label Aus has become noteworthy recently, largely due to the success of tech-house wizards My My's *Songs for the Gentle* LP, released on Playhouse in 2006. Here, Englishman Lee Jones-- one third of My My-- brings more U.S. house sounds back into the Euro scene. With its deep washes and twinkling synths, "There Comes a Time" almost sounds like Larry Heard or Moodymann. But the real treat is on the flip, as renowned Lindstrøm collaborator Prins Thomas takes another step towards techno with a jaw-dropping 12-minute re-work that sounds like My Bloody Valentine remixing Henrik Schwarz-- it's not to be missed.

Stream: Lee Jones: There Comes A Time

Posted by Ronan Fitzgerald in house on Wed: 01-10-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Will Saul and Tam Cooper
“Sequential Circus”
[Simple; 2007]
★★★★

Unfortunately for Will Saul and Tam Cooper, the most exciting thing about this 12-inch (for many) will be the inclusion of the elusive Konrad Black as a remixer. Black has just a handful of releases to his name, but most are as good as this minimal house music gets. So forget the pleasant lushness of the original and Sideshow's mix, and head straight for another skulking piece of gothic horror house from Konrad. Mr. Black is back (again), you just wish he'd stop going away.

Stream: Will Saul/Tam Cooper: Sequential Circus

Posted by Ronan Fitzgerald in house on Wed: 01-10-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Diddy [ft. Keyshia Cole]
“Last Night”
[Bad Boy/Atlantic; 2006]
★½

A year ago, the third season of "Making the Band" proved how-- with the right producers, stylists, dance instructor, and house-mother-- Diddy could build a commercially successful pop item out of absolutely anything. Presumably, that was the point (Combs is a narcissist, but he's endearingly up front about it). Given that he's already pulled back the curtain on his artifice (not that there was much of a curtain to pull), it's always kind of weird to see him subject his own persona to the same processes. It's like watching Dr. 90210 give himself a facelift. Diddy albums aren't just soul-numbing documentations of what Nas means when he says hip-hop is dead. They're also personality tests that determine how you respond to pop culture, as well as explorations into the parameters of what the term "artist" means in the producer's era of postmodern pop.

Take this song, for example. Presented as Diddy featuring Keyshia Cole, and not vice-versa (because after all, it's his name on the album), Combs lays in the background wheezing pathetically over a modest, barebones club-beat, while Cole admirably and gamely struts her stuff all over the rest of the track. This all goes on, repetitively, for about four minutes. The final two minutes are dedicated to a mock phone call from Diddy to his woman:

"You gotta stop playin' with a nigga's feelings," Diddy reproaches. "You know how much I love you… But those couple of seconds when I couldn't get in touch with you… I was ready to come over and shoot that muthafucka up. Fucking dumb bitch!" He's kidding, of course. Whatever this is-- a harmless, club-ready dance track, another ridiculous bit of meta-pop commentary, or an insipid piece of crap--- the joke, as always, is on us.

Stream: Diddy [ft. Keyshia Cole]: Last Night
Stream: Diddy [ft. Keyshia Cole]: Last Night
Posted by Bret Gladstone in hip hop on Tue: 01-09-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

David Karsten Daniels
"American Pastime"
[Fat Cat; 2007]
★★★★

When David Karsten Daniels sings about collecting dandelions in his ball hat, I think of little leagues. I still remember playing baseball when I was eight, especially that night I stood staring at my glove. It didn't blink. I remember the first baseman shrieking by, sprinting into my territory and screaming something about waking up. I turned to see him fling the ball to the waiting second baseman, then trot past me with his disdain dripping like summer sweat. Some second grader had turned a triple off of a piddly blooper, and I knew my brother was right: I was only going to get close to Canseco and McGwire in my dreams.

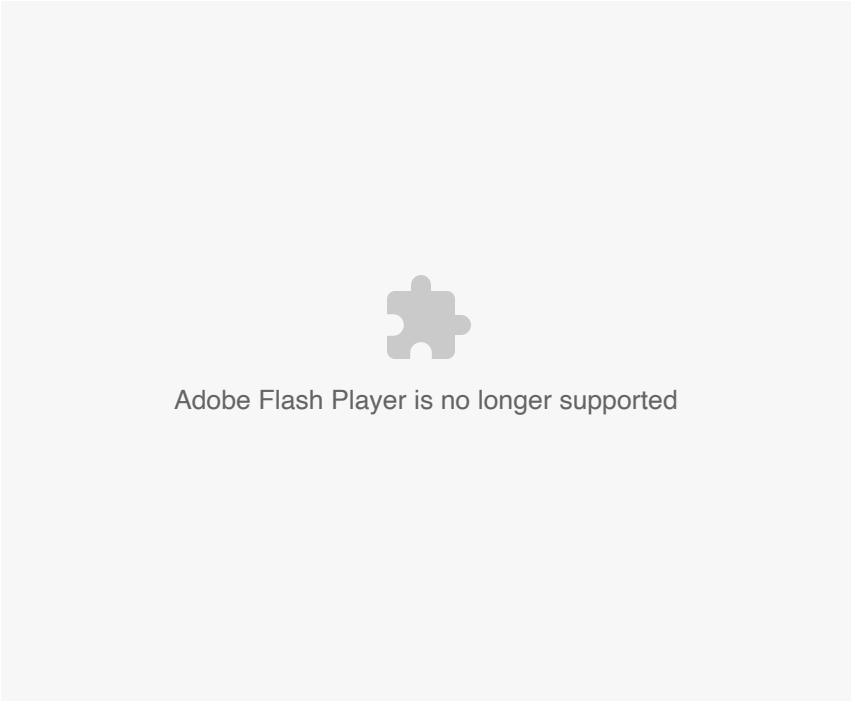
Built over a perfect color-show and guitar-and-drum bounce, "American Pastime's" image gets me. Not everyone was a right-field klutz. Still, when he belts "I'm not cut out for the major leagues," the metaphor becomes a long-distance shot: he needs commiseration for his imperfect game. Misery loves company, even if it comes with minor-league ambitions.

Stream: David Karsten Daniels: American Pastime
Posted by Grayson Currin in indie rock on Tue: 01-09-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Pack
"I'm Shinin'"
[Up All Night / Jive Records; 2007]
★★

"I'm Shinin'" mirrors the same laid-back minimalism of the Pack's cult hit "Vans". But while the sneaker song's flow matched the quiet, slow confidence of its near-transparent beat, "I'm Shinin'" leans too hard on the drums, and the rhythm can't support it. Turning a pitch knob on a hearing-test tone doesn't make the song's hook any catchier, and the rip on Rockwell's "Somebody's Watching Me" (a Pack member howls the title line) isn't doing MJ's proud legacy any favors.

The video begins with a quick shot of a Roland amp, even though this beat couldn't blow out a Macbook. The video's requisite party scene makes more sense, even if it can't redeem the song's flimsiness. Sure, this track's more suited to the club than "Vans" (which isn't a reflection on quality so much as the BPM), but the best part of this (track, video, and all) is getting to see what each member of the Pack's wearing. It's style over style. Watch the video instead.

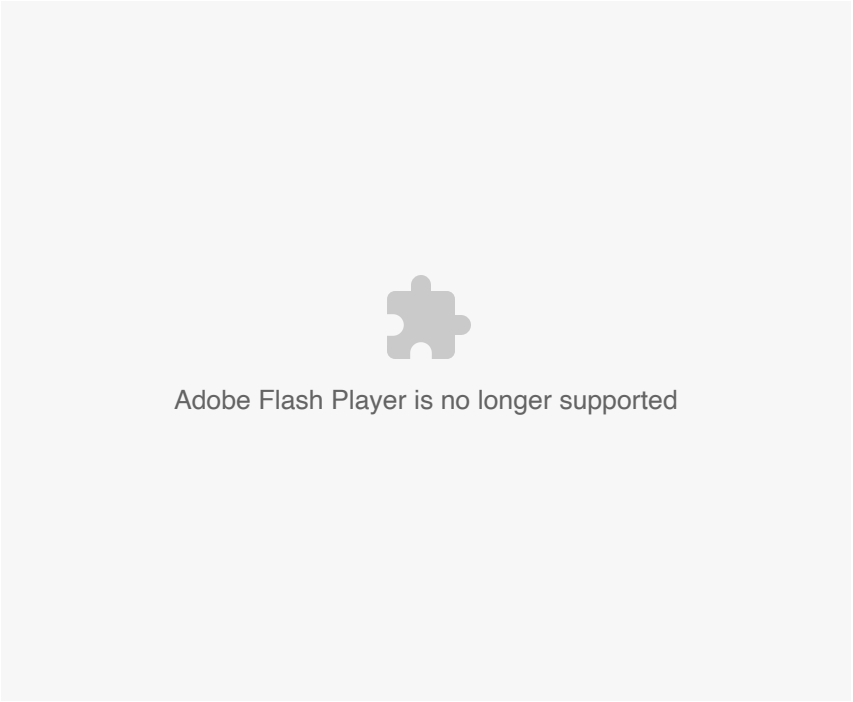


Stream: The Pack: I'm Shinin'
Posted by Jessica Suarez in hip hop on Tue: 01-09-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fall Out Boy
“This Ain't a Scene, It's an Arms Race”
[Island Records; 2007]
★★★

Fall Out Boy are only four albums into their career, but they exist in a climate so temperamental they already feel weary and primed for self-parody. In the video for their new single "This Ain't a Scene, It's an Arms Race", the band use characters from all their past videos, plus a few rock clichés (trashing hotel rooms, visiting the Playboy mansion, recording with a hip-hop producer) for a satire that's unusually self-aware for an emo band-- even one as good-humored and self-effacing as this.

But how’s the single? As self-referential as the video, but without the sense of humor. Incorporating an ill-advised drum machine for its Rob Thomas/Santana-meets-Timberlake verses and pre-chorus, the lyrics reach for more than they can grasp: "I am an arms dealer/ Fitting you with weapons in the form of words" explains the song title, not the metaphor. The stomp of the pre-chorus, and the full-bore, blown-out pop/punk chorus both go a long way towards redeeming that, but there's a telling line at the end of the second chorus-- "Bandwagon's full. Please, catch another"-- implying Fall Out Boy may have become their own guilty pleasure.



Posted by Jessica Suarez in emo on Mon: 01-08-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

These New Puritans
“En Papier ”
[Angular; 2006]
★★★½
Hard to say what’s more shocking-- that an artist would dare to mimic the inscrutable racket of the Fall or that one would even want to here at the start of 2007. "En Papier" contains multitudes in its four minutes, as hexed as it is perverted by its source material. It's all here: the churlish sing-speak, the paradoxically onerous pop, the way the song veers, stops, rewinds. While "En Papier" is unmistakably studied in execution, its skillful, calculated rendering suggests that These New Puritans' apprenticeship may be just that. The song's inherent pretensions hint at a band with the desire to break free of familiar confines, if not necessarily the resolve, although even that will likely come in time. For now, These New Puritans will have to settle for impeccable thievery.

Stream: These New Puritans: En Papier

Posted by Jon Garrett in rock on Mon: 01-08-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Faux Pas
“For the Trees”
[self-released; 2006]
★★★★
"For The Trees" is laptop pop that really wants to be a party jam. Australia's Faux Pas (aka Tim Shiel) cuts-and-pastes big samples with delicately rendered instrumentation. The track is under four minutes long, but packs in a lot-- matador-calling horn samples, something that's probably filed as "official cowbell rhythm track," and three-note keyboard lines. Each mini-hook and variation sounds instantly familiar, whether it's a sample or Shiels himself. He cribs the opening Rhodes line from "I Heard It Through The Grapevine", transposing it up to meet the same key as the song's ringing bell clips, but never abuses it-- covered by three other instruments and samples, it's rendered into pleasant scenery.

MP3: Faux Pas: For The Trees

Posted by Jessica Suarez in pop on Mon: 01-08-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Skaters
“3”
[Pseudoarcana; 2006]

★★★
San Francisco's esoteric lords of tape hiss seem to have cornered the market in were-cow vocals: where other noise dudes wail or scream or howl, the Skaters low like cattle, moo-ing into overdriven signal chains until their looped chants smear to infinity. Their sunburnt approach to fidelity is a thing of beauty, but what makes this track so exceptional is the way that their own technique undoes itself in the final 30 seconds, as they lurch abruptly from a wall of overdriven scree into a whisper-soft, clean recording of the "raw" vocal source from which that wall has been built. It's a simple switcheroo that's quietly stunning.
Posted by Drew Daniel on Fri: 01-05-07: 03:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Mike Jones
“Mr. Jones”
[Ice Age/Asylum/Warner; 2007]
★★★

The first single from Mike Jones' second album repeats the agonies of his major-label premiere "Still Tippin'." Most of these concern his anxieties about wealth: For one, he reminds us again that, before finding success, he "used to get dissed" by women ("Back then hos didn't want me/ Now I'm hot, hos all on me"). There's a sting of pathos here, and in Jones' paranoia about the pack he runs with-- that "even back then all they did was pretend" ("A lot of homies/ Some friends and some phony"). He matches his baroque mood-- the ego, the materialism, and the acid of a high-school reject-turned-arriviste-- to a baroque score. Here, the laid-back austerity of Houston rap gives way to a rich, almost ecclesiastic pomp: pianos, violins, cathedral bells, even a children's choir. The drama is menacing, down to the chorus, as kids belt threats in sing-song harmony. Shorn of the genre's lively neighborhood scenes, slang, and sound, the narcissistic "Mr. Jones" paints not a three-dimensional hometown landscape, but a flat and strangely grim self-portrait.

Stream: Mike Jones: Mr. Jones
Posted by Roque Strew on Fri: 01-05-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Christine Fellows
“Paper Anniversary”
[Six Shooter; 2007]
★★★★

Nearly every silver lining has a cloud on *Paper Anniversary*, the third album by Winnipeg, Manitoba singer/songwriter Christine Fellows. Its most cheerful song is its title track, which takes barely over a minute to celebrate love's quirks and acknowledge the ongoing learning process essential to even the most successful romantic relationships. Fellows' lyrics resemble the compact narratives of the Mountain Goats' John Darnielle, who happens to be her latest tourmate, or the Weakerthans' John K. Samson, who happens to be her husband. Her eccentric-but-conversational voice and staccato, slightly detuned piano help give the song a clinky homemade charm. "Whenever I wanna really wallow in sadness, I play *Paper Anniversary* and open up the fucking floodgates," Darnielle wrote recently on his blog's message board. Maybe so, but Fellows ends this one with a ray of cautious optimism: "There's no better time than the second time of anything/ With you."

MP3: Christine Fellows: Paper Anniversary
Posted by Marc Hogan in folk pop on Fri: 01-05-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Natasha [ft. Clipse]
“So Sick”
[Jive; 2007]
★★★
Natasha's spirited "Hey Hey Hey" introduced us to her breathy, nimble falsetto, a midpoint between Ciara's wafting alto and Amerie's piercing delivery. "So Sick", her second single, bounces again from voice to voice, emotion to emotion, from the verses' piping ennui to the downtown, seen-it-all sass of the chorus and the maudlin glaze of the bridge. More like spectators than suitors, Clipse simply take it all in.

A drum machine patters along briskly before hardening into a bassline. "When you talk love," Malice warns on

the first verse, "that's when I set you free." But Natasha, absorbed by self-regard ("You look so sick 'cause I'm lookin' so fit") and payback jabs ("You must be sick 'cause you didn't sign me"), brushes off the Thornton Brothers' bravado. Not even Pusha's blissfully abstract rhymes about pre-schoolers, hula-hoopers, and state troopers diverts her. Too busy preening, Natasha never engages the rap duo-- she's in her own world, and it's stark there, slipping above minimalism only for the chorus and the rapturous, Rhodes-spangled bridge. A little vulnerability could have brightened everything.

Stream: Natasha [ft. Clipse]: So Sick

Posted by Roque Strew in r&b on Fri: 01-05-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Modest Mouse
"Dashboard"
[Epic; 2007]
★★½

The first single from the new Johnny Marr-enhanced Modest Mouse is so radio-ready, you can almost hear the future *Kidz Bop* version echoing in the background, a children's chorus taking the place of the disco strings that swell behind Isaac Brock. "Dashboard"'s slinking string lines provide the song's most surprising touch-- though they echo Brock's melody, their fluidity sounds alien in Modest Mouse's world of clanking guitars and metronomic drumming. Those dead-stringed guitars and backbeats are odd, though-- drummer Jeremiah Green and new guitarist Johnny Marr made their names on complexity and trickiness, not fist-pumping. This could have been better if Brock had contrasted this uncomplicated, upbeat song with darker, troubling lyrics. Instead he sings, "The dashboard melted but we still have the radio," and I think this is a metaphor for, "we'll all float on ALRIGHT."

Stream: Modest Mouse: Dashboard

Posted by Jessica Suarez in indie on Thu: 01-04-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

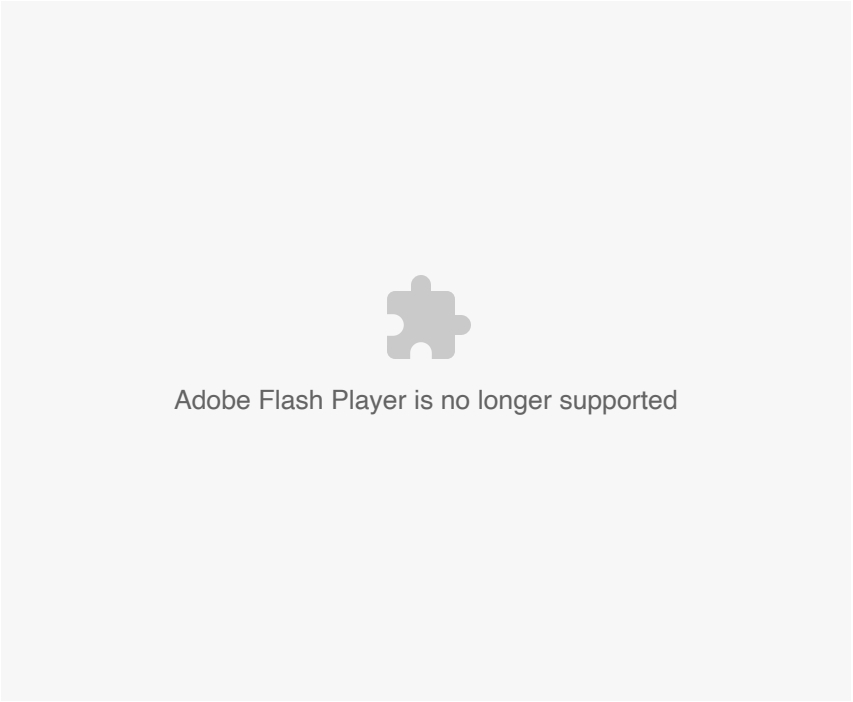
Beyoncé
"Listen"
[Sony; 2006]
★★★½

In *Dreamgirls*, "Listen"'s story is inspirational: a girl overcoming odds to become a woman, a pop star puppet animating herself in defiance of the mastermind producer who thinks he created her. But outside of its original context-- in a scene focused squarely on Beyoncé's character singing while staring down her soon-to-be-former man behind the boards-- the opening piano chords, soft cymbal rolls, and her carefully hushed vocals make her sound about as inspired as typical Disney soundtrack fare.

It's not until the drums come in and she picks up the volume that Beyoncé hits her stride, and when she belts out the chorus, the inspiration is real, tangible, and contagious. If the song's dynamics are supposed to parallel the character's own rise in confidence, it works better in theory than in execution, but by the time she reaches the song's climax, Beyoncé is climbing the scale with an intensity that matches the cymbal-crashing drama around her. *That's* when "Listen" nears "I Will Always Love You" heights of singing-in-the-shower perfection. It's a moment that belongs in a musical-- a shame it's in such a disappointing one.

Though the original video is a forgettable montage of movie clips, the second is less cheesy, and comes closer to capturing the power of the original scene. It features the unhinged look Beyoncé perfected in the "Ring the Alarm" video. Someone give her a made-for-TV movie already.

Version 1:



Version 2:

Posted by Dave Maher in r&b on Thu: 01-04-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bryan Scary
“The Ceiling on the Wall”
[Blacke & Greene; 2007]
★★★★

Bryan Scary's debut album rocks the candy shop, pillaging it for as many audio confections as possible. "The Ceiling on the Wall" is among the sweetest, opening with a choir of multi-tracked Bryans repeating the word "marbles" and jumping right to the chorus-- one of them, that is. There are enough catchy sections here for about four songs, and it's easy to see how he fell in with Apollo Sunshine's Jeremy Black, who contributes drums on

this track-- the only instrument Scary doesn't play. The other chorus comes from a different world, romantic but fantastical, in a Michel Gondry/Terry Gilliam way. The lyrics are about as flung-together as the music, joining words like puzzle pieces that don't quite fit: "If I could take you to the mountains of the moon/ Hiding underneath the noonday gloom/ You wouldn't have to see me fall here daily/ Don't let the ceiling on the wall derail me." It's adventurous, fully fleshed, and catchy as hell-- as indie pop should be.

MP3: Bryan Scary: The Ceiling on the Wall
Posted by Joe Tangari in indie pop on Thu: 01-04-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Thom Yorke
"Analyse (Various Remix)"
[XL; 2006]
★★½

This is one of two remixes that Thom Yorke made available on the XL Recordings website for just a week in December. Labelmates Various remove the cascading, respiratory piano on which his voice floated in the original version. With the piano gone, and a scattered, Richard-D-Jamesian beat in its place, Yorke's voice regains a semblance of the percussive jitteriness absent from other post-*Kid A* releases.

Other differences: the chorus, which pulls back just shy of catharsis on the original, gets a slight nudge forward by Various, who clip it to make Yorke sound as if he's yelling into a fan. Still, the drilling beat, while intricate, overpowers the rest of the track. No denying Yorke sounds best when he sounds as if he's drowning; here he's just drowned out.
Posted by Jessica Suarez in rock on Wed: 01-03-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fennesz
"Badminton Girl"
[Editions Mego; 2007]
★★★

Originally released as part of a split 12" on FatCat, "Badminton Girl" is tacked on as a bonus track to the *Endless Summer* reissue. The track is certainly in line with Fennesz's work just after the turn of the millennium, as he cycles through chords that in another era would serve as the foundation for a rock song, but here are pounded into shapes imaginable only through software. There's a melancholy tug as overtones hover and cluster into something resembling bells, while fat pipes of guitar distortion are sucked through chutes too narrow, stuttering hesitantly before rushing into the darkness in steady waves. A sketch, for sure, and not quite worthy of the multi-layered complexity of the album it's now paired with, but still demonstrative of the man's finely tuned ear and instantly identifiable sound.

Stream: Fennesz: Badminton Girl
Posted by Mark Richardson in electronic on Wed: 01-03-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Hazmat Modine [ft. Huun Huur Tu]
"Everybody Loves You"
[Geckophonic; 2007]
★★★★

Turns out Tuvan throat singers and the blues make a pretty good pair. Hazmat Modine specializes in a kind of generalized roots music that takes from pretty much any roots it sees fit, be they American, Romany, Bulgarian, African or Central Asian, throwing tubas and harmonicas at cultural walls until they collapse. "Everybody Loves You" is a blues crawl built on a lurching rhythm that falls about halfway between Tom Waits and Ali Farka Touré. The members of Huun Huur Tu chant the chorus, then back Wade Schuman's brokedown vocal with rich throat drones and the buzzing overtones that distinguish Tuvan music. Harmonicas wheeze on the sidelines, mingling with Tuvan lutes, while Joe Daley's nimbly played tuba takes the bassline. It's true world music, weird and wonderful to the last note.

Stream: Hazmat Modine: Everybody Loves You
Posted by Joe Tangari in bizarricana on Wed: 01-03-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Arcade Fire
“Intervention”
[Merge; 2007]
★★★

Bigger and bigger, seriouser and seriouser, the debut track from the Arcade Fire's forthcoming sophomore album, *The Neon Bible*, goes for drama from its first pipe organ rumble, fleshed out by somber acoustic guitar and glockenspiel. Win Butler's emotive quaver has deepened into a vibrant Bruce Springsteen croon-- his cry "Who's gonna reset the bone?" could be the Boss himself under different conditions. But Butler's songwriting also delivers all the familiar tropes of the Baby Boomer rock gods: working-class worry, Judeo-Christian imagery, and war. Not that you'd expect anything less in this age from a radio-ready, populist alt-rock single.

The Arcade Fire have always been a product of their influences, yet listening to *Funeral* felt like discovering a new musical language. "Intervention" still speaks that language, with sharper diction, but instead of pointing to new revelations, it rephrases the ideas of rock's stodgiest icons in the group's typically grand fashion. Strings, monster-ballad drums, and an inevitable choir join the mix as the production continues to swell, but screaming the words "Don't wanna fight/ Don't wanna die/ Just wanna hear you cry" in a church doesn't make them holy. The signatures established on *Funeral* remain intact here-- this could not be mistaken for another group-- and given the territory covered by that album, it seems a logical progression.

Posted by Marc Hogan in rock on Tue: 01-02-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Apostle of Hustle
“My Sword Hand's Anger”
[Arts & Crafts; 2007]
★★★★

Andrew Whiteman sings that he's "looking for a new technique," but weighing this track from Apostle of Hustle's second album against material on their debut, it sounds as if he's already found it. Nothing on *Folkloric Feel* was this colorful and dynamic. Flutters of live percussion and spindly guitar dapple a chrome house beat; a low distorted rumble and samples of female laughter assert a more grid-like, complex architecture. Stage thus set, the action rises. Steaming slabs of bass and slapping drums tersely underscore a white soul, feel-good vocal line-- fuzz-chorded, post-Pavement slacker exuberance decorated with squiggly guitar twings. From the melodic phrasing to the panting vocal percussion, "My Sword Hand's Anger" exudes puppy-dog enthusiasm.

MP3: Apostle Of Hustle: My Sword Hand's Anger
Posted by Brian Howe in indie on Tue: 01-02-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Radicalfashion
“Shousetsu”
[Hefty; 2006]
★★★★½

In fairy tales, the mundane opens into the magical, the sweet into the sinister, and everything is charged with uncanny significance. This is the perception of children and dreamers-- a perception that Radicalfashion's "Shousetsu" allows both the able and the aged to reclaim. As lucid and fragile as a memory on the verge of recollection, the track coils telegraphic urgency into a serene, wintry nocturne.

A loose narrative emerges: If "Shousetsu"'s pulsing heart monitor and desperate gasps evoke a dying body, its serene piano represents deathbed forays into the memory of its beginning, when everything was wonderful and strange. The sustained run of solitary piano near the end is the final epiphany, cut short by the rhythm track's decisive coda.

Posted by Brian Howe in electronic on Tue: 01-02-07: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Knife
“Christmas Reindeer”
[2006]
★★½

A Christmas song by the Knife is an immediately intriguing proposition-- their funhouse mirror aesthetic is so mismatched to the quietly poignant/schmaltzy tunes we associate with the season. So the possibility of a song about a demonic zombie Rudolph leading a revolt of other demonic zombie reindeer, and toy-making elves turned soul-sucking druids with the intention of permanently putting an end to Christmas and enslaving humans is just too good to resist.

Unfortunately, "Christmas Reindeer" shows almost none of the excitement and imagination of *Silent Shout*. In fact, the song's "reindeer reindeer reindeer" opening is an exact crib of the "The Dreidel Song"'s "dreidel dreidel dreidel" melody and phrasing. There's a reason for this disconnect in quality: "Christmas Reindeer" is five years old, though this version adds sleigh bells and, due to the absence of an ill-advised guitar solo on the original version, is shorter. The changes are negligible; the song is still one big interminable anticlimax. When Olof's background grunting begins to sound like snoring, you can finally relate. With the deserved success of *Silent Shout* behind them, the Knife should be making New Year's resolutions, not rehashing old missteps.

MP3: The Knife: Christmas Reindeer
Posted by Dave Maher in Christmas electro on Fri: 12-15-06: 03:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

I Heart Lung
“Little Drummer Boy”
[Sounds Are Active; 2006]
★★★
'Tis the season to be obtuse, or something like that. I Heart Lung's Christmas EP is full of free-form improvisations based loosely on themes from Christmas carols. "Little Drummer Boy" is the most interesting and coherent of the bunch. It takes its time getting around to the theme from the actual song, first delivered on hovering e-bowed guitar around four minutes in. Even then, you really have to concentrate to realize that the drawn-out phrases are echoing the "pah-rum-pah-pum-pums" we're all used to. As a piece of music independent of associations with its source, it's interesting for a few minutes, but not all nine. It's basically a soundscape formed from the aforementioned guitar, drums that are more textural than rhythmic and not much else. In that sense, it's appropriately meditative, but it doesn't fill the bill if you're looking for subversive holiday music.
MP3: I Heart Lung: Little Drummer Boy
Posted by Joe Tangari in Christmas free jazz on Fri: 12-15-06: 03:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Killers
“A Great Big Sled”
[2006]
★★★

Brandon Flowers thinks he's too cool for Christmas. And that fact makes this silly holiday trifle an enjoyable study in clumsy conundrums. The music is Santa's-gut huge, with obligatory sleigh bells getting run over by a veritable Mannheim Steamroller of hokey synths, big snares, and the nerd-cowboy-choirboy's "I really mean it (really)" emoting. The melody is over-the-noggin simple in that classic Christmastime way-- and it actually goes down easier than most of *Sam's Town*. But the lyrics-- which live in a bizarre world somewhere between sugarplum niceties and Mozzy melodrama-- are the main draw.

"The snowman is shaping up to be an 8 but not outta 10," starts Flowers. It's a roundabout way to describe a shitty looking snowman, but the line also successfully props up a festive signifier while tweaking it out of the "ugh" zone. From there we get a Rosebud narrative with angelic children turning into wage slaves for a cruel

world that spits out war and violence. It's not subtle. But still, the twinkle of sadness in lines like "I wanna roll around like a kid in the snow/ I wanna relearn what I already know" comes through with the same nostalgic pangs that articulate themselves so well every December. And if the song wasn't obvious enough, it ends with a summary call and response: "I wanna wish you a merry Christmas/ Can't do that." Hardly Dickens, but not exactly Hallmark either; a happy, histrionic humbug to all.

Stream: The Killers: A Great Big Sled
Posted by Ryan Dombal in Christmas rock on Fri: 12-15-06: 12:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Joseph & Mary Chain
"12 Days of Christmas"
[Izumi; 2006]
★★★
"12 Days of Christmas" is always too much. Too long, too repetitive, too many partridges in goddamn pear trees... too much everything. The Joseph & Mary Chain-- comprising the Futureheads, Field Music, the Golden Virgins and Kathryn Williams-- seize on the song's surfeit, to pleasant enough effect. Guitars sparkle like tinsel on a freshly slain evergreen, and the inevitable bells jing-jangle. Turns out this tune's herky-jerk melody is actually a perfect fit for the whirring arrangements of Sunderland, England, neighbors Futureheads and Field Music. The band members' quirky voices and obvious friendship give their performance its necessary a-wassailing conviviality, and their sharp accents help sell the song's ever anachronistic account of multiple Christmases and Noah's Ark-worthy gifts-- "oh, now I get it, they're *British*." Happy Christmastide to all, and God bless them, every one, and um, an angel gets his wings. Too much will be quite enough.
Posted by Marc Hogan in Christmas indie on Fri: 12-15-06: 12:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Imaad Wasif
"The New Year"
[Kill Rock Stars; 2006]
★½
I don't get it. If Imaad Wasif is serious when he says, "I want you to know me," wouldn't it be better for him to actually tell me something about himself instead of just dripping vague "insights" like "There's a love that is old and undying/ and we're closing off and denying ourselves/ this gift"? This whole song is full of blatant statements of fact masquerading as deep human truths. It's like he thinks he can get away with being vague because, well, we all know what he really means. Except we don't, because his sub-Damien Rice voice and his inability here to craft a memorable melodic line even if the entire contents of his stocking depended on it mean we need him to say something, anything specific or visceral or tactile enough to make us care. We already know it's Christmas without some sad sack who's waiting for true love under the mistletoe telling us so.
MP3: Imaad Wasif: The New Year
Posted by Dave Maher in Christmas folk on Fri: 12-15-06: 12:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dan Bryk
"Love Me for Christmas"
[Urban Myth; 2006]
★★★★
Sleigh bells and chimes are a hallmark of popular Yuletide songs, evoking so much winter wonder at once-- reindeer on the roof, hansom carriages in the snow, tinkling icicles falling from the eaves. Leave it to wittily depressive Dan Bryk to warp their good cheer toward the doomy, intoning them like funeral bells amid the ominous drums and minor-key pianos of this gloom-pop Christmas crash 'n' burn. The arrangement creeps and darkly sparkles, evoking the cold winter night but not the warm hearth. Bryk's icily neutral demeanor in the verses is offset by his wheedling chorus, evoking the desperate mood swings of holiday-enhanced loneliness. "When I saw you in late August, it already felt like fall" (sad), "You were crying in the Starbucks at Crabtree Mall" (*so* sad!). Bryk is as jaded as the Trekky kids are earnest; he's the *magic of the season*'s seamy underbelly: "All the gestures are empty / All the decorations are fake," he states flatly, as the "little children sing their stupid songs." A real grinch, all right, but anyone who's got a shitty Christmas or two under their belt will know what he means. Oh, did I mention that the song is kind of a suicide note? Merry Christmas.

Stream: Dan Bryk: Love Me for Christmas
Posted by Brian Howe in Christmas singer songwriter on Fri: 12-15-06: 12:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jim Jones
"Ballin' on Xmas (Clean Version)"
[Diplomat Records; 2006]
★

When I was a kid, *A Very Special Christmas* was my seasonal music salvation. If we were at home, moms had any number of Mannheim Steamroller jams on blast. At the grandparents', it was forever *The Andy Williams Christmas Album*. But occasionally, usually when the grown-ups were preparing something, I could sneak my CD into the family boombox and rock a little "Christmas In Hollis", Run-DMC's jingle about wallet-dropping Santas and macaroni and cheese. So corny, but I could play it without getting yelled at, and I think one time my dad beat-boxed. That might be a lie.

So Dipset remade my favorite Christmas song ever, and it is, unsurprisingly, not at all for the kids. Best-named rapper, Stack Bundles, does not stack bundles of toys for tots but treats for his pockets and penis. I just wrote "penis" in a rap review, and Jimmy Capo's flow is just as ridiculous. Someone needs to ask Santa for a thesaurus. Naughty elf, JR actually calls someone a "queer" on a Christmas song. I mean, damn, fellas. Could this not have been a stream of hilarities like "snowbaaaaallliiinn'", "deckthehaaaaallliin'" and "Rudooooolllphiinn'"? Can we have just a *little* fun? I go to Target to shop. I know what Christmas is. I need you to make me feel better about it. Like this…

Stream: Jim Jones: Ballin' on Xmas
Posted by Peter Macia in Christmas hip hop on Fri: 12-15-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

El Perro del Mar
"Oh! What a Christmas"
[Izumi; 2006]
★★½

Back in my heavy Santa Claus phase, the yuletide carols blasting from my mom's Wagoneer wanted to be symphonies. Julie Andrews saw three ships, and her voice would ascend, angelic, from sprawling Hollywood-via-Lawrence-Welk fanfares. I love the idea that someday the songs my kids grow up hearing will opt for being Phil Spector teenage symphonies instead. Like Tralala's "Christmas Never Comes When You're Alone" last year, El Perro del Mar's new spirit-brightener opens with the "Be My Baby" beat, then bursts into jingle bells and girl choirs. "Oh, how long it was/ Haven't had a kiss since Christmas," Swedish singer-songwriter Sarah Assbring

sings, with her usual melancholy. A shit ton of choruses, a simple horn riff building to a ba-ba-ba coda, and there's not much else to it. "Oh! What a Christmas" certainly won't displace Dame Julie in my heart, but it brings some of the requisite warm fuzzies.

Posted by Marc Hogan in Christmas indie pop on Fri: 12-15-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Trekky Yuletide Orchestra
“God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen”
[Trekky Records; 2006]
★★★½

Any time you play a cover, you have to contend with the nostalgia factor. When it comes to Christmas songs, even the slightest interpretive shading-- ironic, reverent, upbeat or downcast-- is amplified by the deeply ingrained resonance of the source material. North Carolina-based Trekky Records is a network of friends and collaborators-- young (many still in their teens), suburban, classically-minded indie rock kids. The Trekky Yuletide Orchestra, comprised of musicians from across the label's roster, filters Christmas classics through the same kind of sturdy indie rock they curate: "The First Noel" is imagined as a Dirty Three song, "Baby, it's Cold" as Tilly and the Wall, and "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" as Will Oldham's "Riding". The latter has that sort of solemn drag-- Will Hackney's voice cracks, but takes no liberties with the melody; Josh Kimbrough's concise guitar ambles through a dreamy crescendo of piano keys and drum rolls. Styles are shifted, but sentiments aren't-- you can tell that the Trekky kids just love Christmas. They can still feel the *magic of the season*. I can't even type that phrase without scare italics any more. Which, perhaps, makes it even nicer to listen to some nice people singing a nice song about Christmas, and meaning it.

Stream: The Trekky Yuletide Orchestra : God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Posted by Brian Howe in Christmas indie on Fri: 12-15-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Thad Cockrell & Roman Candle
“Christmas Time Is Here”
[Collector's Choice; 2006]
★★★★

Nothing about “Christmas Time Is Here” stands out except for everything, a tribute both to its subtlety and the eloquent, elliptical scenery Thad Cockrell and Roman Candle paint for a screenplay of sentiments: The drums are all snare rims and tambourines, the guitars are slight and soft, and the keyboards only augment the small steps of a slow waltz. Instead of playing up on the song, Roman Candle and Cockrell play completely to their imagery, letting the setting—falling snow, traveling friends, sleeping babies, loving parents—provide its own austerity.

Not that Cockrell’s voice, this cuddly thing you can alwyas trust, doesn’t have anything to do with it. Here, he swoons into a minor falsetto that never cracks, letting Skip Matheny meet him halfway. Both of these guys know the story of the season: Cockrell’s dad is a preacher in Florida, and Roman Candle’s Skip and Logan Matheny grew up in a church music program, their father a music minister for a healthy congregation in the North Carolina mountains. But, this season, they’re here together, providing their own warm spirit as a salve to the cold season: “Everyone you see seems happy just to be / Christmas time is here.”

Stream: Thad Cockrell: Christmas Time Is Here

Posted by Grayson Currin in Christmas indie on Fri: 12-15-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Willie Nelson & Friends
“Whatever Happened to Peace on Earth?”
[2006]
★★½

I feel like a Scrooge panning Willie Nelson's well-meaning charity single. First of all, it benefits a worthy cause-- the National Veterans Foundation. Second, as protest songs go, "Whatever Happened to Peace on Earth?" is

surprisingly persuasive, smartly reclaiming God's will from the right (re: war, "Is that really what God wants us to do?"). Willie wrote it for Kucinich's '04 presidential bid and has been playing it live since then, but this studio version follows the "We Are the World" charity-single model right down to the cheesy sax solos, alternating vocals, and the Michael McDonald. Willie's friends, including Ben Harper, Jack Johnson, and a Doobie Brother, don't make for a very exciting party, which means the song lags whenever Willie's not instilling lines like "But they won't lie to me/not on my own damn TV" with the wounded, bitter pride of a patriotic dissident, which isn't the oxymoron some talking heads would have you believe. Still, just skip the download and donate directly.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in Christmas on Thu: 12-14-06: 03:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Sufjan Stevens
"Sister Winter"
[Asthmatic Kitty; 2006]
★★★★

Long-remembered heartbreak beckons on piano and strings instead of his usual banjo, as Sufjan stuffs your stocking with a depressive's fairytale. "Sister Winter" runs through the same story arc as *A Christmas Carol*, albeit implying rather than describing the three specters. Stevens sings (as gingerly as you'd expect) about a frozen heart that "belongs to Sister Winter," but this song is best when he hits the high notes of the chorus in his frosty falsetto, which has the prismatic quality of icicles in the sun. The song builds slowly and hesitantly, corralling piano and choir and reverent horns, but the triumphant finale sounds wholly earned, as if Sufjan wrote to soundtrack George C. Scott (my favorite Scrooge) throwing open his shutters on a crisp Christmas morning and buying a holiday turkey for the Cratchetts.

MP3: Sufjan Stevens: Sister Winter
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in Christmas on Thu: 12-14-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Sailor Winters
"What Child is This?"
[Silber ; 2006]
★★★
Say you work in the service industry-- maybe in a coffee shop, record store or café-- for a company that's cool enough to let its employees select the in-house music during their shifts, but lame enough to require the dispensation of Christmas-themed music around the holidays. Say also that you like chaotic, convulsive music, and that the joy of tormenting your customers with harsh noise is surpassed only by the sorrow of listening to corporately-mandated compilations of Yuletide favorites each winter. You, my glum friend, have found a loophole in the *Silber Sounds of Christmas* compilation. Sailor Winters' version of "What Child is This?" isn't the best thing on the album, but it's the most amenable to extracting sonic vengeance on the voracious petit-bourgeoisie. The song's sprightly piano melody sounds lonesome, submerged in billowing static; it gives up entirely as the amorphous noise begins to cascade, saturating the speakers in a dark, grainy haze. Things get seriously spooky when a pendulum-like roar starts swooshing through the mix. What child *is* this, anyway? Echoing drums describe the approach of massive footsteps, evoking some terrible and countryside-scourging giant. Jesus is coming-- run!
MP3: Sailor Winter: What Child Is This?
Posted by Brian Howe in Christmas on Thu: 12-14-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Envelopes
"Pink Christmas"
[Izumi; 2006]
★★
Holiday songs usually fail to impress me because of their reliance on sentiment to mask mundane-but-pretty melodies. They're too-traditional traditionals. So Envelopes' fragmentary songwriting style should add some much needed variety to the seasonal music landscape, right? It would, if any of those fragments resembled songs. Instead, the bright production is wasted on metronomic ukulele strumming, inane keyboard lines, and rolling

floor toms that never cohere, creating a song that is less than the sum of its parts. Except for the half-funny, totally irritating Alvin, Simon, and Theodore homage at the beginning, I started forgetting "Pink Christmas" before it even ended. The secret to a successful indie pop song in the ADD mode is that each section is actually incredibly focused and catchy, not that it features a tuba.
Posted by Dave Maher in Christmas on Thu: 12-14-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Venus Hum
"Pink Champagne"
[Mono-Fi Records; 2006]
★★★★
YouTube helped to confirm the smallest traces of Siouxsie & the Banshees in this single from Tennessee's Venus Hum. Lead singer Annette Strean shares some of Sioux's vocal characteristics-- sometimes the same curled-lip coo, other times her brightness and warmth. And "Pink Champagne's" wobbly stop-start beat, along with its static-heavy ticks and beeps and layered lead vocals, adds to its "Kiss Them For Me" flirty charm. The biggest similarity though-- okay not similarity, straight up coincidence-- is in the "Kiss Them For Me" video (the lightest of all Banshees singles), when Siouxsie Sioux swims in a fountain of pink champagne. Health problems (Strean had vocal nodes, and member Tony Miracle has the heart condition the band name is derived from) forced Venus Hum to take a three-year break, but this song bears none of that burden.
Video: Venus Hum: Pink Champagne
Posted by Jessica Suarez in indie on Wed: 12-13-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Octopus Project and Black Moth Super Rainbow
"Psychic Swelling"
[Graveface; 2006]
★★★½
I listened to this collaboration between the Octopus Project and Black Moth Super Rainbow half because of the image at left, a still from the opening sequence to "You Can't Do That on Television", which continues to evoke pleasant memories from my first 10 years of TV watching. This track has little in common with "You Can't Do That on Television" or my first 10 years, and it isn't pleasantly dance-able, sing-able, or hum-able. But the bassline's very *Schoolhouse Rock*, and the organs pile up into layers of Elephant Six-style candy apple hooks. "Psychic Swelling" maintains integrity even beneath the weight of all those pulses, warbles, and electric piano flutters. Everything locks in-- it's a jigsaw puzzle, not a train wreck. That's what keeps this instrumental interesting, rather than morbidly fascinating-- there are so many melodic flourishes and mini-hooks that it's almost as if OP and BMSR were competing, not collaborating, yet they never quite get tangled up in each other.
MP3: Octopus Project and Black Moth Super Rainbow: Psychic Swelling
Posted by Jessica Suarez in micro psych on Wed: 12-13-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Plumerai
"Illuminata"
[Silber; 2006]
★★★½

Credit James Newman and his antsy bass for grafting a cab-forward groove to his usual new-shoegaze synths, and for making Boston-based Plumerai sound like Stereolab giving free reign to their darkest urges. Don't credit the vibraphone though, which gives the song a disagreeably jazzy feel even though it doesn't disrupt the flow. Do credit Elizabeth Ezell for killing herself softly with this song. Her voice breaks gently on each syllable, creating a strange and soulful vibrato that communicates her anguish easily and gracefully, not unlike Karen O ripping her heart out, ballad-style. Most of all, credit Plumerai for crafting a song that draws from popular influences, without coasting on them.

Stream: Plumerai: Illuminata
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Wed: 12-13-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Wheat
“Little White Dove”
[Empyrean; 2006]
★★★½

Once again favoring the elliptical song structures and minimal sound of 1998's *Hope & Adams* over the too-direct pop attack of '03's *Per Second Per Second Per Second... Every Second*, Wheat deliver a sly pop song in three acts. The intro makes good use of Scott Levesque's falsetto, which cracks effectively on the highest notes. The second act deploys classic power pop riffs, handclaps, and melodies, culminating in a de facto chorus that sounds like the band's vying for the Cheap Trick mantle. The song's catchiest moment isn't repeated. The expected payoff never comes, the instruments fall away, and the band launch into a nearly a cappella third act, which layers Levesque upon Levesque upon Levesque to create an odd-- and oddly moving-- chorale. Like their earliest material, "Little White Dove" is intended to be elusive and elliptical, a gracefully concise pop haiku.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Tue: 12-12-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Deric "D-Dot" Angelettie
“Hey, Hey”
[Crazy Cat Catalogue; 2006]
★★★½
You gotta love the ebb and flow of the Bad Boy family saga. After multiple deaths (literal and not), resurrections, vanishings, reappearances, embarrassments and triumphs, they cry, they laugh but they're forever one thing: around. Take Deric "D-Dot" Angelettie, for example. During the mid- to late-90's, he was the captain of Bad Boy's chart-topping Hitmen production team, successfully A&R'd several of the label's biggest albums, and took an alias (the Madd Rapper) just to hate on people. He was the label's resident renaissance man, but he fell off the face of famous people's earth as Bad Boy's prospects dipped, working on only a few dead-end projects. But, as Diddy reemerges as an artist, so does D-Dot, with a random song on hisSpace page. Not exactly on par with *Press Play*'s magnitude, but definitely of better quality.

Angelettie's advantage is that no one cares. He's a top flight producer under zero pressure, and "Hey, Hey" sounds like he may not even listen to music anymore. D-Dot raps like he's had a stroke or a drink, and the beat is all tom rolls and digital claps. It's different, for sure, and because Papa Dot has a great rasp and inarguable skills behind the boards, it's pretty good, too. It's what all rich rappers should be doing-- blasé VIP theme music-- instead of the "I'M HERE, EVERYBODY" fireworks and bullshit they do do. Lay in the cut, wealthy dudes, and make us poor people wonder what's up. As D-Dot would say, "[mumbles] [more mumbles] Hey, hey, hey [mumbles][mumbles][mumbles]".

Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Tue: 12-12-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

My Morning Jacket
“It Makes No Difference (The Band cover)”
[429 Records; 2006]
★★★★½

In my world-- where My Morning Jacket are the best working band, and the Band one of the best long-since-retired-- this cover is math: 5 stars X 5 stars = 25 stars. That's on paper though, and match-ups like this often equal different opposite kinds of awesome neutralizing each other into mediocrity.

But My Morning Jacket and the Band are awesome in pretty similar ways, i.e., hairy dudes with guitars who would be fun to have at a barbecue. From the shotgun sound of Patrick Hallahan's opening snare hits, MMJ's primary motivation is clear: make the original arena-ready. The drums play a key role in accomplishing that goal: Hallahan's choice of never-ending crash cymbals over Levon Helm's ride-and-closed-hi-hat makes a raucous backdrop for MMJ to get the song screaming drunk.

The result sacrifices some of the tenderness of the Band's version, for something wilder and more unhinged. Even the original's canned saxophone solo becomes celebratory, which isn't to say My Morning Jacket are anything less than respectful guests in the Band's house-- just the opposite. When Rick Danko sang, "Stampedin' cattle/ They rattle the walls," this was what he meant.

Posted by Dave Maher in rock on Tue: 12-12-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fat Joe
“Damn”
[Virgin Records; 2006]
★★★★

This has Fat Joe's name on it, but it's not really his. L.V., half of Harlem's Grind Music production duo with Sean C. and in-house producer for Joe's Terror Squad, owns it and lets Joe ride in it. And I'll be that guy that claims a random Fat Joe song that Fat Joe isn't all that impressive on might set New York straight. "Damn" is about as close to the monstrosity of M.O.P.'s "Ante Up", the classic 2000 chainsnatcher anthem, as New York gets these days. It's got a regal major-chord horn section, spaghetti-western guitar melody, 'roid-raging bassline, and Big Fucking Drums.

Remember that, New York? I love you, but you've got to get out of this bullshit defensive mindset. I know you're baaallliiinn' and what not, but I miss videos with a hundred dudes wearing parkas and Tims punching each other in the face just to stay warm. I miss Black Rob. I miss Onyx (shit, I almost miss Biohazard). I even occasionally miss Ruff Ryders. I miss you being invincible even when you weren't. I miss hearing borough slang on songs like "Never Scared" and "What You Know". I miss it all. I know why it's not there, but you can get it back. That's all Jimmy and Dipset are trying to do, and that's kinda what "Damn" does. It lets Fat Joe be the "boogie down Bronxster", not Mr. Lean Back, Esquire. It's inconsequential what he says, really, because he says it right. He's the King Of New York, even if he isn't. That's all due to L.V., and if you don't believe he has that power, L.V.'s the same guy who made Diddy think he was James Brown.

Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Mon: 12-11-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Eleni Mandell
“Girls”
[Zedtone; 2007]
★★★½

"I wonder how you look when you sleep," Eleni Mandell sings at the beginning of "Girls", introducing the song as a potential stalker's waltz. "I wonder how you feel when you kiss." But to her credit, Mandell's performance is wry and knowing, too cerebral to really act on her obsession or to be confused with Laura Cantrell or Nora Jones. Instead, she's observant and composed, traits that pitch "Girls" somewhere between a breezy daydream and a pretty persuasion. The song hits its real stride, though, when the metaphors come in: "I am a marble the color of candy," she sings, patient in her pursuit of the unnamed lothario. "I am the dice you roll in the alley/ I am the pennies that come in handy." Pretty persuasive.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Mon: 12-11-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Rivulets
“You Are My Home”
[Important; 2006]
★★★★

Swap out a single letter, and Rivulets' guiding light Nathan Amundson shares a surname with the man who conquered the South Pole. And while he does chart cold expanses with his brand of reverb-soaked gloom-folk, he isn't set on conquering anything; instead he's content to wallow in the crevices of life's miseries. Amundson's

music is beautiful in moments, but doesn't explore enough of the emotional palette to leave a lasting impression.

Amundsen keeps his musings moving at a glacial pace (not surprisingly, his first two LPs bore the stamp of Low's Chairkickers imprint). As with most Rivulets recordings, "You Are My Home"-- the title track from Amundson's third full-length-- finds the young man sounding profoundly alone in a sea of hesitant, bottom-heavy acoustic strums, elegiac viola, and quivering electric guitar murmurs.

Yet after nearly four minutes adrift, something magical occurs. The titular chorus' upturns have foreshadowed it, but it's a surprise all the same: guitars fall away as a string interlude ushers in a seachange, Amundsen's fey vocals supported in the bowed crests, the phrase "you are my home" now revelation rather than ritualist slogan. When the rattling electric returns (underpinned this time by a simple piano melody), it's in triumphant swells-- it seems our dour troubadour has cracked an ever-so-slight smile, and it's enough to melt icebergs.

Stream: Rivulets: You Are My Home
Posted by Matthew Solarski in gloom folk on Mon: 12-11-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lil Wayne
“Famous”
[2006]
★★★★

Pick your three favorite rap songs, and get three sets of speakers. Start the first. Wait two seconds, and start the next one. Wait five seconds more; start the third. Now imagine what you're listening to is all one track. Imagine Lil Wayne rapping every hiccup, stutter, and overlapping verse. Wait, go back and make sure one of those songs has a couple of bars in French. Substitute a minimal boom bap with a cavernous metallic snare for all instrumental tracks. This is "Famous", a snaking standout from the latest installment in Wayne's infinite mixtapes.

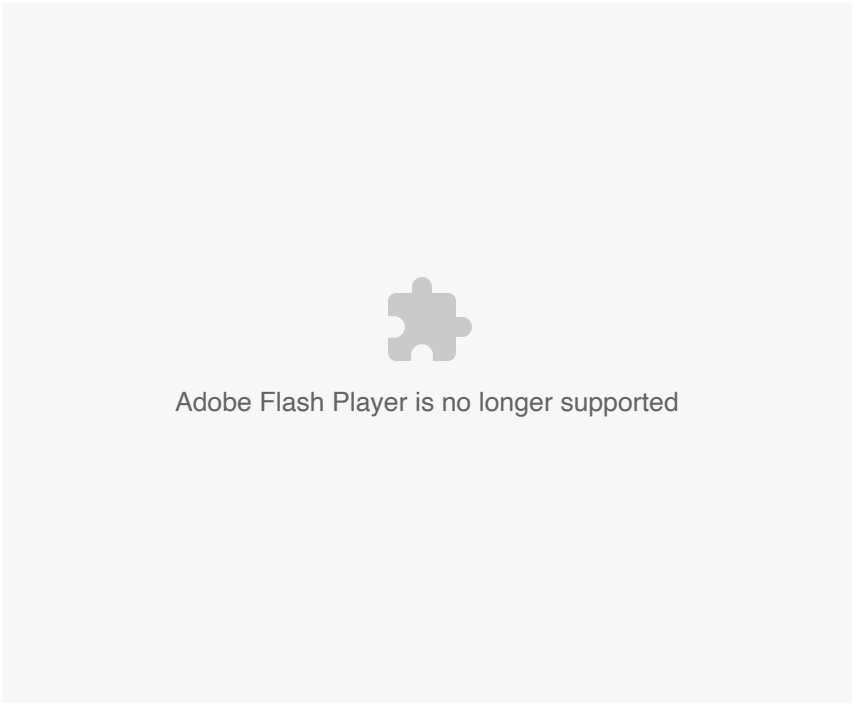
For Wayne, words take precedence over kilos or contracts. Young Dictionary, he calls himself at the end of his "Show Me What You Got" **remix**, also on this mixtape. Even better, his boundless, bouncing imagination and his love of pure sound on the level of the syllable keep "Famous" so entertaining even he can't contain his giddy laughter in between rhymes.

MP3: Lil Wayne: Famous
Posted by Dave Maher in hip hop on Fri: 12-08-06: 03:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lullatone
“Bedroom Bossa Nova”
[Audio Dregs; 2006]
★★★★½

Two years after Gwen Stefani started dropping the phrase "super *kawaii*" (we know, sooo last album), many Americans still aren't entirely comfortable with cuteness in their music. But much like noise, coke-rap, or space-disco, being cute-- *kawaii* is the Japanese word-- has its own underground aesthetic, offering occasional glimpses of the avant-garde. Japanese ambient duo Lullatone redraw the possibilities of cute music on "Bedroom Bossa Nova", using toy instruments, ultra-detailed homemade production, and child-like imagination as their brightly colored construction paper.

Where the Go! Team's adventure pop and I'm From Barcelona's smiling choirs rely on superabundance, the emphasis here is on space, which shouldn't be surprising given the minimal electronic bent of Lullatone's previous three albums. Think the Boy Least Likely To on a Sigur Rós scale: Shawn James Seymour's halting ukulele is joined by light, ramshackle percussion, as Yoshimi Tomida whispers sleepyhead melodies . Birds, tiny seeds, and meeting the sky "to say hello" become the most important things in the world for these three minutes. Even Lullatone's "mistakes"-- a missed strum, a shy giggle-- sound like happy accidents. It's great getting wound up, but doesn't Stefani ever miss afternoon naps?



Posted by Marc Hogan in pajama pop on Fri: 12-08-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tiné
“Cobrinha”
[Luaka Bop; 2006]
★★★½

Like most of the gems on Luaka Bop's stellar new documentation of Northeastern Brazil's "Mangue" beat movement, "Cobrinha" thrives on a sense of space and texture. Simply but elegantly stratified, the traditional rhythms the record employs are always busy but never rush-- even as buoyantly percussive lines jostle and push for domain, the music manages to lag behind pleasantly, retaining its languid charm. Portuguese has an inherent musicality, and here the title ("Cobra") is meant to evoke how Tiné snake-charms lyrics above and within the loopholes of that structure. Shaping his words coolly and delicately, seductive phrases stretch and constrict as he weaves a Moorish Oud melody through a tapestry of acoustic guitar, violin, and simple percussion. Other voices thunder in on the chorus, throwing it skyward. What's charming about the track (like the record) isn't the sound of Brazilian music embracing the postmodern techniques that turned American pop stale-- sonically, Brazilians have always been among the pre-eminent postmodernists. Rather, it's that their intertexuality and pastiche still seem kind of innocent and imaginative-- groping less for cultural capital than sustenance and the movement of bodies. And look, no Beatles quotes!

Posted by Bret Gladstone in Brazilian on Fri: 12-08-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Haig / Miller
“Atmosphere”
[2006]
★

Oh my god. The people who thought that Interpol disgraced the sacred name of Joy Division? Wait'll they hear *this*. I'm all for revision, but Haig/Miller's defilation of "Atmosphere" manages to entirely miss the point *and* suck on its own terms. The source material follows through on the promise of its title: The synths are deep and warm, the percussion at once sprightly and austere. Electronic chimes palpably rip through the mix. The bass is oceanic, and Ian Curtis's voice is thick as sap. In this version, a turgid house beat and shrill synths conspire to strangle every ounce of inflection and contrast out of the song. Nothing else happens. Paul Haig, ex-frontman of Joy Division contemporaries Josef K, should've known better, but his prettification of the vocal is still the best thing here-- he sifts the loose grains out of Curtis's haunting melody to suit the frictionless elevator-techno whizzing around him. If these guys are capable of making one of the most poignant rock songs ever sound trite, does that mean if they covered John Tesh they'd be totally rad?

Posted by Brian Howe in cover on Fri: 12-08-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Bird and the Bee
“Again and Again”
[Blue Note; 2006]
★★★½

I propose a toast to the internet, for doing poor ol' ma and pa the service of schooling our youngsters in those delicate matters of birds and bees. I'd also personally like to tip my hat web-ways for teaching me about the Bird and the Bee, the L.A.-based duo of songbird Inara George and production/multi-instrumentalist busy-bee Greg Kurstin. While later songs on the pair's self-titled debut venture into questionable territory, B & B really nail it with opener "Again and Again", a dreamy midsummer acouspop ditty par excellence and a spry meditation on those crazy little things called relationships.

The tune opens with spare, spacey keyboard that has me thinking "Reading Rainbow" for some reason (perhaps its eerie datedness). Then Inara enters in nightingale mode, caressing the upper register, alighting on a strummed acoustic-cum-tambourine groove, sounding pigeon-bored and chirping ambivalent extremes: "I hate you/ I want you/ I hate you/ I hate you." Kurstin is refreshingly unsure-yet-confident too, introducing a buzzing bumblebee synth to underscore the second verse and gracing the final refrain with a winning touch: a dotty keyboard that flits up and down the scale as though a hummingbird's trapped within. It suggests the delirious rush of love's nectar-- or lust's drastic throes, you make the call.

Stream: The Bird and the Bee: Again and Again

Posted by Matthew Solarski in boutique pop on Thu: 12-07-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Plus Device
“Pupil Measurement”
[Hefty; 2006]
★★★½

How very Detroit of new Hefty signing Plus Device to remain anonymous, letting the stiff and jerky drum programming and biting synths speak while the personalities behind the music remain unknown. Whoever these two are, on this track the alleys of their minds are filled with the sounds of classic electro-into-techno, with robotic handclaps, a relentless bass ostinato, and a heavy acid bass raspberry blowing time on the one and three. It's a sound that's easy to do decently, harder to do well, and harder still to make completely your own. Plus Device don't quite carve out a distinctive identity, but that matters very little when this thing is booming out your car's factory deck on a rainy late-fall evening. It's the kind of music that makes even the cheapest car stereo sound like gold, the two enduring prides of Detroit coming together as one.

Posted by Mark Richardson in electro techno on Thu: 12-07-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Explosions in the Sky
“Welcome, Ghosts”
[Temporary Residence Limited; 2006]
★★½

Guitar, bass and drums excepted, self-awareness is the tool everyone knew Explosions in the Sky had to master to beat itself in the sub-genre whose doors it lifted. Through no fault of Explosions’ own, two dozen bands now mine the same twinkle, build, brood and roar dynamic and swipe their resplendent tones and nearly imploding passes. Evolve and survive.

The first 100 seconds of “Welcome, Ghosts,” the second shortest song in the quartet’s catalogue, realize that self-awareness: instruments, sounds, and motifs arrive to disappear every 4-13 seconds, undermining the band’s customary distensions. But the last four minutes-- 20 and 30 second clips of steady rhythmic steps and amplifiers alternating in the mix-- dismiss it, forsaking directed turns for a slowing climb that nearly stalls. Sure, the result still feels like a deserved peak through the clouds, but it’s less a revelation than a band meeting concision somewhere right of center. Four years ago, this would have been a new love, but, by now, it’s a well-rehearsed, consistent climax. Different, just not.

MP3: Explosions in the Sky: Welcome, Ghosts
Posted by Grayson Currin in post rock on Thu: 12-07-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Young Jeezy
“Don't Ever Do That”
[2006]
★★★½
Everybody loves Jeezy for his ad libs, but who are we kidding? Jeezy's "HA-HAAAA"'s and "YEEAAAAAAUUUUUUHHHHH"'s are more preconceived than his verses. He's a catchphrase dictator, and he comes with a couple mandates on this deep cut from his recent DJ Drama mixtape. First, if anyone is thinking of reaching for a strap, "Don't ever do thaaaaat." Second, if any snitches want to go tell, "Don't ever do thaaaat," either. Other things Jeezy does that we aren't allowed to do: buy Beamers with seats "brown like Jiffy," fall asleep counting bricks, "motherfuck them sheep." Who needs complicated lyrics when we can hit the streeternets with five new slogans after one Jeezy song? When he says he's not a rapper, he's not lying. Jeezy is a copywriter. He even convinced Drama to change his drop to a drawled, "Gangsta Grillz, ya bastards." Big deals! And as long as he keeps having this much fun 17 tracks deep on mixtapes, I'll buy what he's selling. Keep in mind, too, that Jeezy's got Georgia dudes plying him with insane carnival beats for songs most people will never hear.
Posted by Peter Macia on Wed: 12-06-06: 03:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Common
“I Have a Dream [ft. will.i.am]”
[Hollywood Records; 2006]
★★
I think we should all agree that 2006 was the year Will.i.am at least began to atone for the sins of Black Eyed Peas. Between Too Short's "Keep Bouncin'", Game's "Compton", and Nas' "Hip Hop Is Dead", Mr. am's been steadily proving himself as an able, if not exceptional, hip-hop producer. One thing, though, BEP's pre-Fergalicious albums had some jams, and even *Monkey Business* had a pretty decent song with Cee-Lo and Q-tip. Maybe I've said too much, but maybe Will doesn't deserve *all* the bad press he gets. Even if he does, he knows how to chop a drum break, and "I Have a Dream" is no exception.

Will.i.am's trick is to take his favorite song from a particular artist and "pop" it a little bit. For Common, he seems to favor *Like Water For Chocolate* because "Dream" is a variation of that album's mid-tempo Soulquarian funk, only cleaner and more radio-ready. This is "Peace, Love & Gap" Common, so it needn't get too gully anyway. Plus, the song is for this year's version of the white-teacher-saves-brown-students flick, *Freedom Writers*, so let's keep it in perspective. It's definitely better than "Gangsta's Paradise". Com has some nice lines in the first verse about being "born on a blacklist" and having "struggle as my address ", and the second verse surprisingly pertains to the plot of the movie. But there's something about Will.i.am dicing MLK's speech into a tidy sample that feels extremely creepy. Maybe I'm a sucker for context, or maybe I just don't like the idea of Coca-Cola Common and Will.i.am-a-Pepper scooching King over in his casket for a press photo.
Posted by Peter Macia on Wed: 12-06-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Port O'Brien
“I Woke Up Today”
[Tecolote; 2006]
★★★★

This Oakland band comes off like We're Not From Fucking Barcelona: instead of using many voices to extend a warm, scruffy, slightly creepy welcome to all listeners, these several singers (just a handful actually, not a full choir) convey a folksy, angsty isolation. Sure, they're all singing together, but the lyrics are mostly in first-person singular, evoking the feeling of being adrift on the vast ocean and powerless against its immense surges and undercurrents. The song's loose dynamic and acoustic guitar-and-tambourine shuffle make it sound like a campfire sing-along about how cold the fire is. Even though it fades, the song isn't over so soon. Tacked onto the end is an odd epilogue that begins with distant screaming before settling into a new melody, lasting not even a full minute. This unexpected punctuation on the song makes more sense in the context of the EP, but by itself the coda is still intriguing. It comes out of nowhere like a hidden track at the end of some 90s alt-radio album. Most

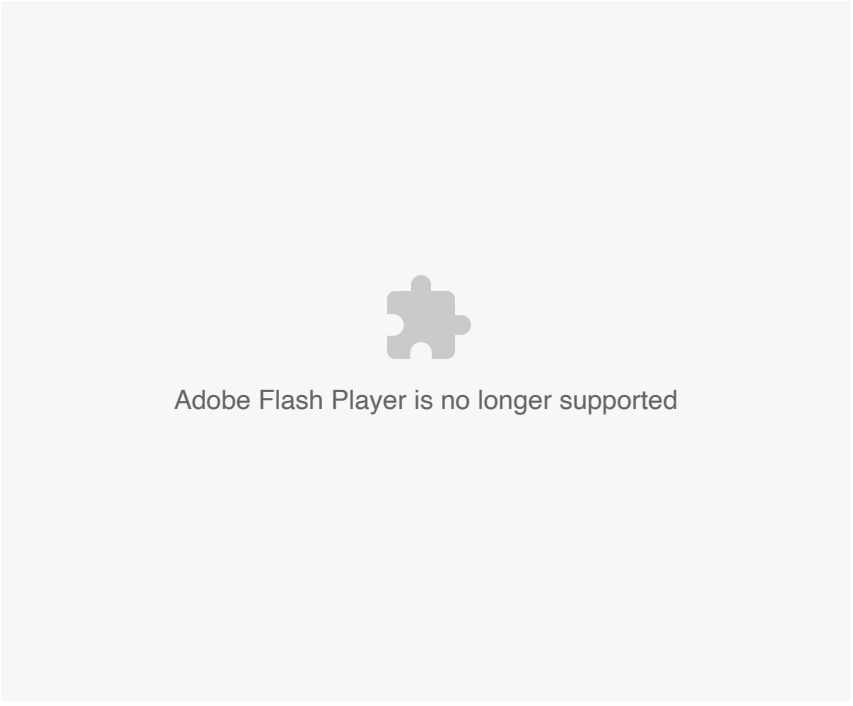
crucially, it cleverly comments on the song that precedes it, hinting at what everybody did with their day after they woke up.

Stream: Port O'Brien: I Woke Up Today
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Wed: 12-06-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Wild Beasts
“Brave Bulging Buoyant Clairvoyants”
[Bad Sneakers; 2006]
★★★★

Oh. Oh wow: these vocals. Such pubescent caterwauls are usually contraindicated with jumpy, jangly guitar pop. So what makes this track work so well, then? Is it the ugly/beauty mix or is it that this amazing, horrible voice won't stop? Maybe it's that lead singer Hayden Norman Thorpe's voice can also slip gracefully into sweet falsetto before plunging again into that awful sound (listen to how it changes just over the course of singing the title). That's the same thing said three different ways, and all on different listens-- the song begs for repeat plays. Wild Beasts did well to keep the instruments lite and breezy, letting Thorpe direct this drama-- his lyrics, appropriately, are about life and death, opposites that are, like many aspects of this song, a little too close for comfort.

One other thing-- Spencer, you've been out-Krugged.



Stream: Wild Beasts: Brave Bulging Buoyant Clairvoyants
Posted by Jessica Suarez in indie on Wed: 12-06-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lindsey Buckingham
“Under the Skin”
[Reprise; 2006]
★★★½

Somehow, Lindsey Buckingham has come out looking like a proto-indie pop genius. In a way, he always was: his songs both with Fleetwood Mac and solo are stripped down and ultra-lush, fusing L.A. pop formalism (especially via Brian Wilson) and a no-more-than-necessary approach to arrangements, melody and his own deceptively complex guitar playing. The title track to his most recent album harkens back to some of his work on FM's 1979 underrated semi-classic *Tusk*, seeming both DIY and awkwardly commercial (and I'm guessing minus

the blow). With a rich, if rather lo-fi mix of acoustic guitar and tapped percussion, Buckingham sings about doubt and uncertainty ("when your soul falls out...where do you belong?"), drenching his voice in reverb, singing in not much more than a whisper. He sounds depleted, as if just getting the words out is a task. Nevertheless, what should be beyond melodramatic-- especially coming from someone with such a storied, successful past-- seems passionate and idiosyncratic. Recommended.

Posted by Dominique Leone in pop on Tue: 12-05-06: 03:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Reuben Butchart [ft. Antony]
"All There Is to Tell"
[2006]
★★★½

There's nothing quite as dull as hearing someone describe their dreams to you, so when Reuben Butchart starts this cabaret pop song with the line "Last night I had a dream" and then goes on to describe being "tied up wrist to wrist" "in a faintly fragrant wind" "on a shore that stretched for miles" and "held hostage on the golden isle"...well, my thoughts drift elsewhere. But Antony snaps me back into the song. His verse takes the song into the island interior and turns the beach rumination into a *Lost* cliffhanger with a dangerous river, rushing rapids, and the ominous roar of a waterfall downstream.

That's a pretty extensive metaphor for one song, but Butchart and Antony manage to salvage "All There Is to Tell", despite that off-putting first verse (and besides, shouldn't the song be the dream itself and not the telling of it?). They have an easy chemistry, which isn't news: Butchart plays piano in the Johnsons. His high, tensile voice melds dramatically with Antony's voluptuous vocals, and the strings quiver so delicately they sound like a current pulling them along toward the falls. It makes the sense of romantic trepidation achingly palpable-- who knows if those falls represent certain death for our heroes, or promise something more beautiful.

Stream: Reuben Butchart: All There Is to Tell
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Tue: 12-05-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fam-Lay
"Head Bust [ft. Pharrell]"
[2006]
★★★★

While Clipse are representing the whole Eastern Seaboard, Pharrell's other colleague, Fam-Lay is pure Seven Cities, the collection of independent Virginia burgs scattered around the mouth of the Chesapeake River, including Fam-Lay's Norfolk. Spend some time around there, and you'll get used to the sound of the shipyards, the gargantuan body shops where the biggest boats get built: 30-story cranes dropping girders, warning chimes, and the weary drawl of the yard workers. That's what "Head Bust" sounds like to me anyway. The Neptunes' beat definitely echoes Clipse's "Grindin'", but a dingy triangle melody and eerie synth undercurrent actually give the familiar hydraulic thump a little more depth. Plus, the real star is Fam chasing the plinking triangle with his Nawfuk block talk:

"Imagine how tough it is to run for your life/ When you under that knife/ when your lungs gettin' tight/ And your grandma callin' you to come to that light/ And you know you wanna hug her, but something ain't right."

Pharrell even sounds a little Virginian on the chorus, mouth-breathing his usual, entertainingly bogus gangster hook, but this time with a touch of front porch in it: "Stand back, nigga, don't get ya head buss." Ha, okay, Uncle P, we'll stand back.

Stream: Fam-Lay: Head Bust [ft. Pharrell]
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Tue: 12-05-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pykrete
“Treeswingcougar”
[2006]
★★★½

In diehard rock circles, non-rock music is often viewed with suspicion at best, and outright disdain at worst. Rappers, DJs, laptop artists, and noise musicians (*especially* noise musicians) are routinely written off with one sweeping proclamation: "*I* could have done that." This brush-off misses that the point of noise music has less to do with elite technical facility than communal experience, where art is appreciated for its phenomenal manifestation, not its performative superiority. But in the case of Pykrete, the point becomes moot-- Chuck Johnson is doing shit that you probably can't do. Johnson's sound art, like Maja Ratkje's, doesn't go in for the common drone-or-roar approach; instead, it saturates your attention with highly specific yet unidentifiable braids of sound, striking stark tonal and textural contrasts. No sound in "Treeswingcougar" attaches to an obvious source or signifier; its profound subjectivity engages the listener to dream up their own context or to experience sound as an untamed, message-less medium. To me, its accelerating blur of pistons and crackles is like riding some ghost train through a violent electrical storm; to you, who knows how it might express itself? Pykrete's compositions are steroids for your imagination.

MP3: Pykrete: Treeswingcougar
Posted by Brian Howe in noise on Tue: 12-05-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Young Jeezy
“3 A.M.”
[Def Jam; 2006]
★★★★½

If Timbaland's untouchable 2006 reign is any indication, those steroids worked. Bigtime. I'm not exactly sure how losing fat and gaining muscle equates to the finest moon man secretion funk the world's ever heard, but I wouldn't be surprised if Pharrell is ordering bulk quantities of True Mass Chocolate as you're reading this. In his renewed quest for the producer crown, Timbo saved his best for pop, not hip-hop. And, with rumored Tim records nowhere to be found on *Kingdom Come* or *Doctor's Advocate*, it looked like the Virginia visionary would finish his most astounding year without a true rap mega-monster. Then came this buzzer beater.

"3 A.M." expounds on the same mouth-percussion mindfuck technique that made "My Love" the most exciting No. 1 of 2006. Timbo recently put in recording time with Björk, and traces of her 2004 vox freakout *Medulla* *shhh*, *pop phft* and *duga-duga-duga* throughout the track. At a recent listening session for Jeezy's new disc, the MC expressed some anxiety about working with Tim given his out-there rep-- God knows what he thought when he first heard this thing. But the Atlanta slugger (also newly svelte) finds a pocket outside of his Southern synth comfort zone here, even if he's talking complete nonsense. No question, though, it's Timbo's show. They say it's lonely at the top, but this muscly guru seems more than happy to keep pissing off the ledge.

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Mon: 12-04-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Saigon
“Desperado”
[2006]
★★★
Now that Clipse are out, NYC's Saigon is at the top of the list of rappers with albums forever pushed back. Despite not releasing his Just Blaze-a-thon, *The Greatest Story Never Told*, for yet another year, Saigon became a pretty famous fictional rapper with his appearances on HBO's *Entourage*. But he's actually a good real rapper, and a really good *real* rapper.

Saigon's spent his time upstate and this year took his tooken chain back from a dude who stabbed him in the face with a beer bottle, yet he doesn't take every opportunity to puff his chest. On the contrary, "Desperado" is Saigon offering himself as a bad example and offering discipline to those who don't listen. He shakes his head at his

baby sis shaking her ass to R. Kelly ("'Move your body like a snake,' what?/ You need to take your ass to school and get them fuckin' grades up") and shakes the shit out of his little brother for talking back to their mom, but he also makes sure to let the streets know not to act up unless they want Saigon to "run up on you with the heat." And he says it all with a smack on the back that could, at any moment, become a smack in the head. That's Saigon, though: the friendly neighborhood enforcer. The only problem is Saigon didn't smack deep-cut producer, Scram Jones when he foolishly chipmunked the Eagles for this beat.
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Mon: 12-04-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Daylight's for the Birds
"To No One"
[This Generation Tapes; 2006]
★★★½

This song is great because of one great moment: singer Amanda Garrett's delirious delivery of "We belong to no one," three minutes in. It's a complete free fall, and by the time the ground has reformed beneath it 30 seconds later, the rest is thin air. If you are Daylight's for the Birds, it's the kind of moment that gives you the song's title, and the kind that makes you place that song at the beginning of your debut record. Garrett is addressing a "you" in this song, but we might as well assume she's talking to herself (or, you know, no one) until this moment, when she cuts through the guitar squall to belt that one line directly at whomever broke her heart. It's a shame to label this "dream pop," because it's most effective when the dream is broken.

[Photo by Aliya Naumoff]

MP3: Daylight's for the Birds: To No One
Posted by Dave Maher in indie rock on Mon: 12-04-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Situation
"Pine Street"
[Elephant Stone; 2006]
★★★½

What buzzard luck. This Philly band released a fine debut album and then abruptly split, but let it not be said that we looked the other way. "Pine Street" is simply a good song; it's a thoughtful, drifting ballad on an album of heavily varied guitar pop that provides an introspective moment to catch your breath. An acoustic guitar provides the basic framework, but the song's graceful, floating pentatonic bass line and searching lead guitar cast it in a spacey context. Vocalist Christopher Tucker reminds me of the Bluetones' Mark Morriss in a lower register, and he does a great job of bringing things back to earth on the chorus by altering his delivery to a heavier belt. "There is something asking you to leave/ when you know that you can't go/ there is knowledge waiting on the road/ but you know that you won't go," he sings, putting the pine in "Pine Street." It's sort of an inversion of the Animals' "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," where instead of burning to leave, the narrator just longs to think about it and really desires at heart to stay home.

Stream: The Situation: Pine Street
Posted by Joe Tangari in guitar pop on Fri: 12-01-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Explorers Club
"Don't Forget the Sun"
[unsigned; 2006]
★★★½

Beach Boys. Beach Boys, Beach Boys. Beach Boys!!! Like Brian Wilson entering his own John Malkovich portal (so that's why he stayed in bed), the Explorers Club's musical language has a one-track vocabulary-- Beach Boys?-- but somehow speaks volumes. Unlike most psych-rockers who cite *Pet Sounds* as an influence, the Charleston, S.C., sextet would actually sound at home in that record's grooves. No whiny indie vox here: Four singers pool their voices in majestic waves of harmony, while "God Only Knows" keyboards, horns, soft

hand claps, and tinkling percussion make for the most convincingly Beach-ready recent production not helmed by New Orleans' Hercules. It'd be a little tribute-bandy if it weren't so damn effective; "Don't Forget the Sun" places the group in a harmony-drenched, slightly spacey tradition spanning from the Zombies to Super Furry Animals. "I wish the summer sun would last the whole year long," the Explorers Club sing. Learn to say their name-- at least until they find their own portal and the reviews start writing themselves.

Stream: The Explorers Club: Don't Forget The Sun
Posted by Marc Hogan in pop on Fri: 12-01-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tartit
"Ansari"
[Crammed Discs; 2006]
★★★★½

Congotronics producer Vincent Kenis hit the Sahara earlier this year to capture a different kind of trance music performed by this desert blues nontet. The group, like fellow Tuareg rockers Tinariwen, formed in a refugee camp, but their music is more cyclical than that of their more well-known counterparts. The band's five women play percussion while the four men play electric and acoustic guitars. Everybody sings. "Ansari" is a captivating piece of music that trades verses lead by a solo male voice for huge choral moments, and the rhythmic dynamics are excellent, balancing stop-time passages with jumping beats driven by handclaps. There are two jaw-dropping guitar solos, and neither break the song's hypnotic rhythmic momentum. It's amazing how rooted to geography music can sound, and this music somehow is the Sahara, with towering dunes roiled by wind, and the arid, empty expansiveness unique to that part of the world.

Posted by Joe Tangari in desert blues on Fri: 12-01-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Summer Cats
"Hush Puppy"
[unsigned; 2006]
★★★½

I'm actually not sure unsigned Australian band Summer Cats' "Hush Puppy" has much to do with either cats or dogs, but it's way better than goldfish. Played by three boys and three girls, the song's fizzy guitars, dreamy keyboards, and straight-ahead drums melt together in a happy lo-fi haze that makes it hard to pick out instruments. "Get lost," singer Scott Brewer suggests. Thankfully, that's much easier.

"Hush Puppy" started circulating on indie-pop mailing lists in mid-November, but so far only a pair of Spanish-language blogs (and lucky Victoria concertgoers) seem to have caught on. That, like Brewer's maturing narrator, could change, as new listeners discover the band's sound: a messy melange with hints of countrymen the Go-Betweens as well as the post-C86 bands. As for Brewer, he sounds almost giddy in his lovesickness. "Disappointment turns to laughter now," he sings. It's almost summer Down Under, and I'm a cat person.

Stream: Summer Cats: Hush Puppy
Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Fri: 12-01-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Ballet
"Corduroy (ft. Ramesh Srivastava)"
[self-released; 2006]
★★★

Plenty of the Ballet's press so far has said they sound like the Magnetic Fields, and with their keyboard-preset beats and Myspace slogan ("4 queers, 3 chords, 100 melodies"), they do very little to discourage that. As statements of purpose go, they could do worse-- more bands could stand to focus more on writing memorable melodies and less on burying what they've got in production "aesthetics" and vocal affectations.

And the Ballet almost pull it off. The vocal performances in the final minute of "Corduroy"-- where singer Greg Goldberg is joined by Voxtrot's Ramesh Srivastava-- are particularly pretty. That minute is the only heart-tugging

part, when the whole song should be a puppet master. It's a short tale of a doomed romance, but the facts are: "it took a week to fall in love" and "a week to fall apart." The narrator's affections seem almost completely unrequited; thus, his other half's insistence that "it was too good to be true" sounds like a half-hearted attempt at humoring him. I guess that's what happens when you start swooning over textiles.
Posted by Dave Maher in indie pop on Thu: 11-30-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Prinzhorn Dance School
"You Are The Space Invader"
B-Side: Prinzhorn Dance School
"Eat, Sleep"
[DFA; 2006]
A-Side: ★★★½
B-Side: ★★★

Hey surprise: this band doesn't make dance music. Unless you bump this track up a few dozen BPMs, the song only yields a few knuckle-dragging herk-jerks, nothing more, but it could collect pools of water inside its pockets of dry bass and hollow toms. That emptiness means it's easier to listen to them lob accusations ("You're hiding from your sister"), implications ("There's a baby boy/ and a baby girl") and dubious facts ("You know white bread gives you cancer") over these three minutes of "Come Together"--style insolence. Their accents (Prinzhorn hail from Brighton, UK) only intensify the sneer-- perfect for the upcoming remixes, though this first single shows that there's no need to wait.

"Eat, Sleep" sounds as if the band is responding to the accusations. The duo's male and female vocalists shout "Eat...and sleep!" between reminders that "there are monsters" out there-- the best possible reason for hiding out in your room.

Stream: Prinzhorn Dance School: You Are The Space Invader / Eat, Sleep
Posted by Jessica Suarez in indie on Thu: 11-30-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Black Sheep
"Whodat?"
[Bumrush; 2006]
★★★★

Snakes, snowflakes, cornflakes, cupcakes, an avalanche, a ranch, a sumo, polka dots, bottle rockets, tomahawks, and somersaults. That former Native Tongues MC Dres is able to fit all of these things into the span of one under-promoted comeback single is a good case for why "Whodat?" is one of the most fun hip-hop songs this year. Nas is pissed, apparently, the Game is crying into Dr. Dre's voice mail, and Jay-Z thinks it's a good idea to call a song "Beach Chair". So here comes Dres thinking he's a more composed, party-hosting version of Ghostface in *Supreme Clientele*, using an *I Spy* book to write rhymes, saying he has or will "swing a battle axe at a poodle," and making a compelling case for why he needed a comeback at all.

Though "Whodat?" (and most of the digital-only *8WM/Novakane*) is Black Sheep in name, former DJ and occasional MC Mister Lawnge and his constant references to his own "9.5" are absent. The music doesn't slack, though, with the upbeat two-punch bassline and triplet trumpet counterpoint matching Dres' excitement. "I'm-a speak unaware that you speak of relevance," he says, and without even trying, he becomes relevant anyway-- a good party usually is.
Stream: Black Sheep: Whodat?
Posted by Dave Maher in hip hop on Thu: 11-30-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Professor Murder
" That's How They Getcha (Chinkuzi Riddim Version)"
[2006]
★★★½

"Sail away, sail away, sail away," goes Murder's lead singer Michael Bell-Smith at the start of this track, once again showing how the band like to re-appropriate bland phrases ("Free Stress Test") for their songs. But vocals are all Professor Murder brings to this track, which comes out on the other side of this remix less muscular and smelling like Depeche Mode's seat after they've gotten off the bench. This is the 80s DM we're talking about, the stuff that tickled your nose while you sipped it, and similarly, Professor Murder's stomper becomes the kind of dance track you can do Stevie Nicks spins to without spilling your drink. I'm saying this like it's bad or something-- it's not. What's so impressive is that this remix is simply their vocal track over the "Chinkuzi Riddim"-- light beats and fingertips-only keyboard lines versatile enough to render dozens of different takes (anyone can get the instrumental track from the original producer). Its effervescence is its best quality-- it allows Bell-Smith's shouts to ride on top, and his lyrical tricks and repeats to stand out more. Yeah, it's dance funk you can listen to for the vocals.

MP3: Professor Murder: That's How They Getcha (Chinkuzi Riddim Version)
Posted by Jessica Suarez in dance on Wed: 11-29-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: NOMO
“Rocket #9”
B-Side: NOMO
“New Tones (Matthew Dear Remix)”
[Ubiquity; 2006]
A-Side: ★★★★
B-Side: ★★★½

NOMO + Sun Ra = hot 12" action. Michigan's afro-funk big band takes on the man from Jupiter with knives out, and winds up with a deep groove monster topped by freaked-out horns and spaced chanting.The track begins with a squall of cosmic jungle noise, as horns squeal freely and percussion piles up to lay the groundwork for the nasty two-chord swivel the rest of the song rides. Leader Elliot Bergman's recent fetish for "sawblade gamelan"-- amplified metal not unlike the tricked-out likembes used by Konono No. 1-- gives the already sick rhythm section yet another source of kinetic energy. The metal instruments are each given their own locked groove at the end of the twelve-inch's first side, thrown like bait for an adventurous DJ-- that's if his stylus ever makes it there.

On the flip, Matthew Dear takes the lead track from the band's excellent *Nu-Tones* album apart by stripping it down to the beat then slowly mixing and matching various musical elements from the rest of the song. Nothing he comes up with equals the ass-shaking drama when the synth-bass drops in on the original. But his reductionist approach creates a hypertense ball of rhythm that keeps gathering steam but never blows it off, teasing with snatches of flute and sawblade gamelan, but always pulling away from the explosion when it's almost in reach. If you need a final release, feel free to turn it back over.

MP3: NOMO: Rocket #9
Posted by Joe Tangari in groove on Wed: 11-29-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jennifer O'Connor
“I Never Loved You”
[Matador; 2006]
★★★★

"I Never Loved You" is a dire break-up ballad complete with rainy-day guitars, a bravely vulnerable performance, and constructive self-delusion-- it could be Jennifer O'Connor's "Irreplaceable". The sound is fuzzier and less folk-based than that of her solid album *Over the Mountain, Across the Valley, and Back to the Stars*; its sonic and lyrical claustrophobia keep with the song's intimations of abuse and escape. O'Connor again proves she's as formidable a songwriter as she is a singer, conveying overwhelming uncertainty in that chorus just by singing the title over and over. At first it's a taunt to a cruel lover. Then it becomes a self-motivating mantra, as she's trying to talk herself into leaving. Next it's a lament: why did she take his shit for so long if she never really loved him? And finally, it's a cathartic clearing away of the past, writing it off so she can start anew.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Wed: 11-29-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Blake Miller
“Cut Your Hair”
[Exit Stencil Recordings; 2006]
★★★★

Remember what Devendra Banhart was like circa *The Black Babies*? The humble, ineffably weird lo-fi arrangements? The submerged warble? The gray-hued melodies meandering through vaguely sinister atmospheric noises like surf through pylons? If not, Blake Miller-- less memorably named than Banhart but just as rudimentarily striking-- is here to remind you. While I'd be down to hear Miller take a stab at Pavement's slacker classic of the same name, his "Cut Your Hair" stands on its own merits-- as retiring as its namesake is feisty, it's one of those songs that fills you up with compact quietude. A queasily bent tone launches a tumbledown arpeggio into an ocean of tape hiss. "I was lost at sea," Miller breathes into your ear, his full-bodied falsetto sounding credibly sans-compass. He bolsters his loose approximation of a melody with shimmering caesurae and mysterious updrafts, then rolls into a shaggy shuffle as he lays down we-are-Siamese-if-you-please-type vocal harmonies. Goes to show that lo-fi freak-folk still works beautifully when there's a unique charisma shining through the murk, despite the crowdedness of the freaky field.

MP3: Blake Miller: Cut Your Hair

Posted by Brian Howe in freak folk on Tue: 11-28-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Shivers
“Beauty”
[Outer Borough Records; 2006]
★★★★½

Left to guess, I'd say the Shivers were French, not Brooklyn. Lead singer (and only permanent member) Keith Zarriello's voice carries an eerie, mesmerizing eroticism, which makes me think of French men, oddly, or maybe just what you get of them in new wave films. This track is a particular type of love song, where love's object has recessed behind the feeling of love itself, which takes prominence in the singer's obsession. “I live off love/ I feed off love/ I breathe off love,” he sings so crisply that the song's acoustic guitars float and fade away, like ice too thin to stick. But for all the calls for survival, he doesn't sound urgent-- just patient. “And if you ever leave me/ I'll never will be sore” he sings, right before his voice becomes gentle, and additional harmonies cradle it. After all, it's the feeling more than the object, which only become more intense with separation.

MP3: The Shivers: Beauty

Posted by Jessica Suarez in indie on Tue: 11-28-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jesus H. Christ & the Four Hornsmen of the Apocalypse
“Connecticut's for Fucking”
[self-released; 2006]
★★★½

Delivering uneasy laughs at the expense of strip-mall culture alongside power chords and pop hooks, "Connecticut's for Fucking", by the New York outfit JHC&tFHotA could easily have been a hipster insider's mean-spirited and elitist satire of yokel outsiders. Instead it comes across as something much more complicated than simply making fun of people who aren't from New York. Sounding a little like Amy Sedaris fronting Fountains of Wayne, Risa Mickenberg (who's the Jesus H. Christ part of the name, although there seem to be more than four others in the band, not all on horns) sings from the perspective of one of many teenagers whose only pastime in such a dull state is recreational sex. She delivers lines like "I love to listen to classic rock and have sex with you" with a mix of playfulness and resignation, and introduces a little gravity into the band's humor: all those adolescents, she observes, are "waitin' to turn into the people we are bound to turn into." There's a healthy dose of incisive class commentary as well: "If we can't afford to buy antiques," she sings, "then we just copulate." "Connecticut's for Fucking" sounds more substantial than a novelty track, but with all the catchy fun that label implies.

MP3: Jesus H. Christ & the Four Hornsmen of the Apocalypse: Connecticut's for Fucking (clip)

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Tue: 11-28-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Patrick Wolf
“Accident and Emergency”
[2006]
★★★★½
Showering light over the darkness of his past work, Patrick Wolf is dropping the dour-bohemian routine. "Accident and Emergency" (based on the A and E chords) abandons his subdued, classically tinged preciousness for high-tech bombast: ringing martial fanfares and glitchy New Romanticism. Once steeped in intricacy, Wolf's work now radiates candor, cutting an as-the-crow-flies route to the heart and hips, thanks to a fresh stress on rhythm (that pop cornerstone) and naked sentiment. It redeems vapidities like "And just get yourself back into the ring/ Knock us out," Wolf's flamboyantly warped Bernard Sumner howl immersing every word in anthemic swagger. These lines, tilting against a din of trombones and sirens, glow with guilelessness, optimism and exuberance, and deal the mercy stroke to the old Gothic doom-and-gloom. It's a good look.
Stream: Patrick Wolf: Accident and Emergency
Posted by Roque Strew on Mon: 11-27-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lyrics Born
“Bad Dreams (live)”
[Quannum; 2006]
★★★½
Say it with me: *live rap album*. If the words don't leave a slightly sour aftertaste, then you probably haven't listened to many live rap albums. In this regard, rock is rap's mirror image. The former's reckless abandon makes it ideal for the stage; the latter's emphasis on crisp sonic clarity (and we're talking big-ticket rap here, not a bunch of hungry dudes spitting in a cipher) is tailor-made for recorded media. San Francisco MC Lyrics Born is unique in that his hip-hop feels more realized in the live setting than on his albums. Like a rap George Clinton, LB is funky, soulful and ecstatic, nowhere more so than on "Bad Dreams". In this rendition, performed live in Australia, his band makes the most of the track's ridiculously outsized stomp-- a staccato, single-note guitar lead slaloms through meaty bass bombs and brutally wah-wahed chords that lock into a mighty sway. LB holds it down at the axis, belting out overdriven soul like a whiskey-voiced Cee-Lo. Like many undie rappers, his music can be unduly tentative, but nowhere is this evident on "Bad Dreams", which remains a vital-sign spike in a nearly comatose rap underground.
Posted by Brian Howe in hip hop on Mon: 11-27-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Frances
“Kettle”
[self-released; 2006]
★★★★

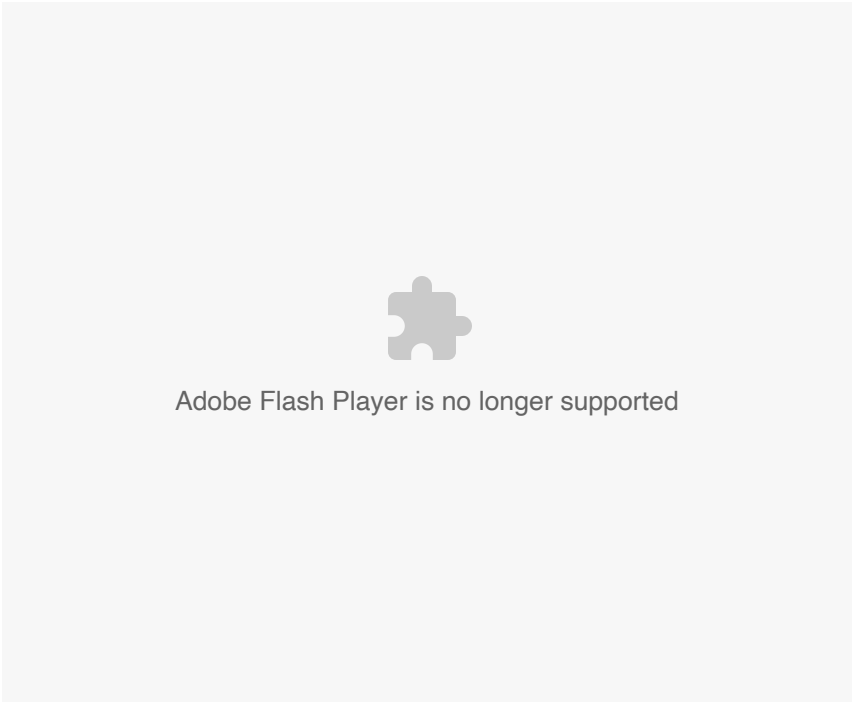
Here's where the strings come in. And here's where the bass trombone and French horn come in. And now the clarinet. And the accordion. Frances are a quintet, but they have a lot of musical friends-- and they sound big without sounding grandiose on their debut EP. This waltzing song has a dream-like quality as leader Paul Hogan piles on the glockenspiel, piano, and everything else in thoughtfully applied layers. The verses have a mysterious, antique feel, like something that might have played as an old carousel spun endlessly by a boardwalk and people walked by at sunset in their Sunday best. Stephanie Skaff's porcelain vocals are perfect in this environment, and she's joined by Hogan for the huge, ascendant choruses. The orchestrations are sophisticated and complex, far more than your average window dressing, and as an opening shot, the EP this is drawn from is quite a statement. I can't wait to hear the LP.

MP3: Frances: Kettle
Posted by Joe Tangari in orchestral pop on Mon: 11-27-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Spektrum Spektrum
“Don't Be Shy”
[Non Stop; 2006]

★★★★

I'm sorta scared of girls. Not sure how I ever wound up with one (not complaining!). So I believe every quiet, nervous kid should keep a copy of "Don't Be Shy" in, like, a flash drive under their beds for complete inoculation against ever feeling embarrassed around the opposite sex again. Some of the most memorable sexy songs this year have worn out somewhat unsexy words like "promiscuous" and "sexy," but London-based Spektrum try a bolder tack, as singer Lola Olafisoye spouts NSFW requests (orders?) I'd still feel funny typing. "Music makes me say these things," Olafisoye insists. That bossy groove does have a point, though I'm guessing the squeaky, Jaxxed-up synths got a word in, too. It's genre-, and maybe even gender-nonspecific, with a whirling urban naughtiness. Drinks are spilt, hands get sticky, and for a moment it seems like Spektrum will indeed "dance forever." But then when would they leave the club?



Posted by Marc Hogan in dance pop on Wed: 11-22-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Timbaland [ft. Nelly Furtado & Justin Timberlake]
“Give It To Me”
[2006]
★★★★★

Hip-hop's unchallenged pop auteur, à la Brian Eno, Timbaland has parlayed his subtle experiments in bottom-heavy orientalism into that rara avis: commercial success and critical acclaim. Leaked from his second proper solo album (absent Magoo, that is), "Give It To Me" exhibits a talent immune to formula, a miracle of bankable avant-gardism. The opening verse sustains Nelly Furtado's rebirth as a sexpot, flowing from a moment of opacity ("Amnesty International got bankrupt") toward a moment of self-consciousness ("You love my ass and my abs and the video called 'Promiscuous'").

Fulcrum that he is, Timb takes the middle verse, building a mountain of serene, nothing-to-prove braggadocio that transcends Billboard rankings: "Your song gonna top the charts, I heard 'em, I'm not a fan-n-n-n-n." The beat on this track alone-- another stuttering, spectral, densely layered marvel-- certifies this unyielding faith in his aesthetic. Where the sliced-and-diced syllables of "Stay Fly" were stylistic flourishes, here they're utilitarian, reshaping lines in the mold of the wheeling, serpentine melody. On cue, Justin Timberlake shimmers in for the farewell verse, distilling the essence of "Give It To Me", with its preening vanity and halting carnal rhythms, into one question: "Now if se-sexy never left, then why's everybody on my shit-it-it?"

Posted by Roque Strew in hip hop on Wed: 11-22-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ciara
“Promise (Kyaal Remix)”
[2006]
★★★★½
The original defined slow burn, its tantric groove recalling Aaliyah's classy sensuality. So when Ciara first cooed lines like, "You can be my teacher I'll do homework/ You can give me extra credit baby I'll do more work," she sounded sexy, not smutty. Especially when coupled with its video's elegant, mesmerizing choreography, "Promise" easily became one of the year's best r&b singles. All that makes this equally appealing synth-pop overhaul-- courtesy of this self-proclaimed "Remix King of Sweden"-- even more audacious and impressive. Fearlessly reinventing the near flawless track, Kyaal boosts the tempo, adds a bulbous funk bassline, airy drumbox flitters and echoing cowbell, emerging with a totally '80s flashdance zip that all but demands its own rainbow leotard aerobics video. Now, the singer's sweaty passion evaporates into a bubbly blast of teenage exuberance. It's all smiley, pre-crack Whitney-- Ciara just wants to dance with somebody who loves her. Sultry, sweet; win, win.

Stream: Ciara: Promise (Kyaal Remix)

Posted by Ryan Dombal in r&b on Wed: 11-22-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Modern Temper
“Started a Fire”
[2006]
★★★½

Here's a good example of a band-- in this case, Chicago's Modern Temper-- displaying an influence without sounding anything like it. They're taking clear cues from the Dismemberment Plan, but making the source their own: the drums' pauses and gaps inject air into the track, which is dense with incandescent synth but never feels crowded, and the guitar chimes in to answer Joel Ebner's clear-eyed tenor vocal (full disclosure: Ebner is a former P-fork staffer). The arson committed by the song's protagonist amounts to the literal destruction of a faltering relationship's physical vestiges, a would-be cleansing blaze that only causes more pain. This all adds up to a relaxed, mechanized breeze of a pop song about arson that feels earthier than it probably should.

MP3: The Modern Temper: Started a Fire

Posted by Joe Tangari in post pop on Wed: 11-22-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Sally Shapiro
“I Know”
[2006]
★★★★½
Ego is no object to Sally Shapiro, our childlike empress of the disco whose shyness still precludes her from singing in the presence of anyone-- even her own producer, Johan Agebjörn, who's said he vacates the room and mows the lawn while she records. Given the pair's immaculate track record-- Euro-envisioning Italo revival gem "I'll Be By Your Side", frosty B-side "Time to Let Go", and Nixon cover "Anorak Christmas" all sparkle and soar with angelic grace-- the cynics among us might be cawing fall. And for the first few seconds of *Disco Romance*'s "I Know", you worry they're right-- man, do those opening keyboard bars redefine schmaltz.

But it's all a ploy, and before you know it Sally's whisked you away from the lounge of the damned to her own private, cloud-forged disco wonderland, heart set on realizing escapist fantasies for all. Hand in nervous hand, she coos between flashes of heavenly light, "I know you're my love/ Even though/ Sometimes I/ Believe/ I will wake up/ From this dream," suspending each closing syllable in the synth-spun ether. Elsewhere, her shaded versework traces the shadows on the dark side of the disco ball, while Agebjörn's shimmery synths sync up with all the bright spots, everything in constant, pulsating, revolving motion. All you need worry about waking from, my friend, is this six minute disco dream come true.

MP3: Sally Shapiro: I Know

Posted by Matthew Solarski in italo disco on Tue: 11-21-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jesse Sykes and the Sweet Hereafter
“LLL”
[Barsuk; 2006]
★★★★

On her first two albums as well as on this new track, Jesse Sykes shows all the presence and personality of a solo artist: she has an achingly gorgeous voice, otherworldly in its confident expressiveness, and the look of early-70s Emmylou Harris, with that straight black hair and aquiline features. Sykes may be working a retro angle, but she inhabits "LLL" completely, hollowing out her vowels, enunciating dramatically, and generally sounding half-present in this world but connected to another. And the Sweet Hereafter earn their co-billing, framing her performance in a spirited jam that's as much Crazy Horse as the Grievous Angels. As the song progresses, Phil Wandscher takes the reins and leads the band to a stoked guitar-solo finale before settling back into the dust.

MP3: Jesse Sykes and the Sweet Hereafter: LLL

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Tue: 11-21-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Miranda Lambert
“Crazy Ex-Girlfriend”
[Epic; 2006]
★★★½

While not as fiery as her debut single "Kerosene", Miranda Lambert's "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend" is admirable because it casts her as the title villain rather than the heroine. Boasting that she's been to five bars, checked 30 license plates, and packs a pistol, Lambert owns the part, spitting out her lines likes she's breaking pool cues over her leg. While her rebelliousness sometimes comes across as needlessly manufactured (smashing a guitar on stage should never come off as scripted), she obviously knows what sets her apart from other Nashville performers like Julie Roberts and Carrie Underwood and gleefully plays it up. As a result, "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend" is seriously deranged in a way country stars usually don't go for, with no sense of wrong or right and no resolution to the confrontation. The whole thing might be a little worrisome or even exploitive, setting up country's equivalent of a catfight, but Lambert obviously savors the chance to get her boots dirty.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Tue: 11-21-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Nas & Jay-Z
“Black Republican”
[Def Jam; 2006]
★★★★

Don't worry, it's not an after-the-fact endorsement for dashing Pennsylvania wannabe governor Lynn Swann. The collaboration to end all collaborations has Jay penning more duality diary entries, likening his crumbled corporate thug persona to the titular anomaly while Nas is the steadfast "black militant" looking down on hip-hop's romanticized hood from on high. Although Jay begins his weepy confessional with "I feel like a black Republican," the well-intentioned, bumbling doubt of his verse comes off as downright Democratic. He once again looks back on a lost best friend, trying to justify ruthlessness to his audience and, above all, himself. "So the pressure for success can put a good strain," he rationalizes, "On the friend you call best and yes it could bring/ Out the worst in every person and even the good and sane." While this song marks a long-awaited union, Jay-Z concentrates on a break-up. It's a contradictory choice for a man constantly wrought with inner conflict-- a struggle that gets more difficult with every new black card.

Nas is decidedly more cocksure. Whereas Jay clearly frets over his diminishing street cred, Nas doesn't think twice. "I’m back in the hood, they like, 'Hey Nas'," he starts. Whereas Jay foolishly acknowledges Jim Jones' existence elsewhere, Nas stays above the fray here: "I’m standing on the roof of my building/ I’m feeling the whirlwind of beef, I inhale it." Whereas Jay's self-conscious rhymes clash with the song's grandstanding

Godfather-sampling beat, Nas sounds like a true don. So, what'll it be? Insular basket case or omnipotent archangel? Diebold wouldn't even fuck this one up.

Stream: Nas & Jay-Z: Black Republican
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Mon: 11-20-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jay-Z
"30 Something"
[Def Jam; 2006]
★

The aspirational lifestyle always agreed with Jay-Z. When he said "I'm rapin' Def Jam 'til I'm the $100 million man" on 2001's "U Don't Know", we threw fists up, knowing deep down he wasn't balling like that. Now, during Dr. Dre's mild "30 Something", we politely nod. That movement, asserting the affirmative, is antithetical to Hov's ideology-- hustle-then-move, mean and vicious. He's not a businessman or a business, man. He's the establishment, resting on laurels, hush-rapping his way through the trenches populated by "lil niggas," "young boys," and "young'ns." In other words, people working as hard as they can to make it. Didn't he used to be Young H.O.? Appealing to a new audience, or at least one that has presumably grown with Jay, isn't the worst idea in the world. But he can't have it both ways. He raps, "I'm a bully with the bucks/ Don't let the patent leather shoes fool you/ I got the fully in the tux." Don't they have metal detectors at these galas he attends? Don't tell us. Show us what you got. Thirty will never be the new 20. Sounds like a cute coffee mug for your office though.

Also, Jay, you're not 30. You're 37.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Mon: 11-20-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Nas
"Blood Diamond"
[2006]
★★

When "Blood Diamond" begins, it sounds as though Nas will be rapping from the perspective of an actual blood diamond, rasping, "They dug me out the soil in the mines of the motherland." For a moment it feels like a sharp update of his own "I Gave You Power", in which he raps from a pistol's perspective. The Game made a similar move earlier this year on "Ol' English", a story song seen through the bottom of a bottle of malt liquor. But "Blood Diamond" briskly and randomly abandons that conceit for grumblings expressed more entertainingly by Kanye West on "Diamonds From Sierra Leone (Remix)" last year, and lucidly updated by Lupe Fiasco on the chilling "Conflict Diamond" in 2006. By now we know the plight of mineworkers forced to dig through muck, mounds, and their own humanity to find shiny rocks that will adorn the ring fingers of unwitting soon-to-be housewives. So the operatic African chanting and by-the-numbers drum programming (note the 'Serious' preset) only undercuts the teeth-grinding intensity that's become Nas' modus operandi. A shame, really-- only a clever update could save this otherwise obvious piece of film-scoring.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Mon: 11-20-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Clipse
"Trill"
[Jive; 2006]
★★★★½
We can all stop threatening sit-ins for Clipse because they're here. Say it. Say "They're heeeere," like that freaky chick in *Poltergeist*, because this song is some cruel static. "Trill" is one of the nastiest, most despicable beats I've ever heard. At its black heart, it's a club song, but it's so ugly you'd have to be its mother to want to dance with it. While dishing out frilly (read: horrible) shit to Jay-Z et al, the Neptunes saved the sci-fi/horror-nerd tracks for their VaBeach buddies Pusha T and Malice. As the bass bludgeons, the synth grinds off your domepiece, the brothers Clipse eat your brains. They relish their role as remorseless demons, and they talk death

like it's nothing. And that's why we love them. When Chad, Pharrell, Pusha, and Malice get together, it's always absurdly foul:

Pusha: "Flow chameleon/ Worth by the million/ Sell the Bolivian/ Feds in oblivion/ Bitch Brazilian/ Purse reptilian/ Took her from off her island like Gilligan"

Malice: something about his moonwalking watch and haters, Billy Ray Cyrus reference

Pharrell: "Bitch, I'm trill/ Bitch, I'm so trill/ Nigga, I'm trill/ Nigga, I'm so trill"

Chad: (one-finger jamming on Korg)

Reads familiar, I know, but on record it's filthy and amazing. Point is, I should have had this song on Halloween, Jive Records, but you blew it like you blew it for three years. So now "Trill" is my Christmas song, and everyone's getting a lump of crack.
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Fri: 11-17-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Marcel Khalife
“Taqasim, Part One”
[Connecting Cultures; 2006]
★★★★

Marcel Khalife is a Lebanese oud player who spent the formative years of his career playing in bomb-damaged venues, and who once had his tapes confiscated by the Israeli army. Though much of his past music included the work of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, *Taqasim*, his new three-part work, is an instrumental tribute to the poet. "Part One" is an expansive reimagining of the oud's role in Arabic music, casting it in a loosely improvisational, jazz-like context. Khalife gets the most out of the lute-like instrument's lower register, intertwining it with Peter Herbert's upright bass on a series of memorable themes. The modal harmony and minimal percussion gives it an ancient, time-worn feel, as though this music has criss-crossed the cradle of civilization for centuries.

MP3: Marcel Khalife: Taqasim, Part One (clip)
Posted by Joe Tangari in Arabic on Fri: 11-17-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Akon
“I Wanna Love/Fuck You [ft. Snoop Dogg]”
[SRC / Konvict Muzik; 2006]
★★★½

Along with being the best hook man in hip-hop (so what if it's the same two hooks over and over?), Akon's a very shrewd man. While giving his helium howls a break last year, he trotted out copycat crooner T-Pain, who had silly hair but still kept his mentor in the public consciousness ("Hey, is that Akon? No? Well, it sure sounds like Akon! Love that guy."). T-Pain also functioned as a test case because-- on the radio at least-- this song follows the formula to his hit "I'm In Luv Wit a Stripper" quite closely: boy sees girl, girl snaps thong, boy's eyes go "awooga!" and tongue rolls out into a red carpet. When T-Pain sang it, he came off as a helpless dope who knew what he was getting into but couldn't resist. Akon's straight-faced family-friendly version is more curious-- after all, nobody *wants* to *love* a stripper. But switch "love" to "fuck" and it all comes into focus, with Akon taking the win while T-Pain dilutes his Hennessy with foolhardy heartbreak.

Stream: Akon: I Wanna Fuck You [ft. Snoop Dogg]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in r&b on Fri: 11-17-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Shahrokh Yadegari & Keyavash Nourai
“Longing”

[LilaSound Productions; 2006]
★★★★
You've probably heard a lot about Iran lately, but the stream of rhetoric and brinkmanship that's driven a huge wedge between our countries hardly comes from the same universe as this. "Longing", named by its performers for what it sounds like, is a wrenching violin improvisation by Nourai, tweaked and kneaded by Yadegari. Yadegari is credited with playing "Lila, a computer music instrument," which is used to sample the violin in real time and then modify the tones. Both performers have lived in the U.S. for a long time, and you can hear them striving for something new in the Western manner, while still holding on to tradition through use of Radif, the basic organizing principle of traditional Persian music. The result is mildly exotic and genuinely haunting.
Posted by Joe Tangari in Persian ambient on Fri: 11-17-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Trick Daddy
“Yeah, Yeah, Yeah [ft. Lil Wayne]”
[Atlantic; 2006]
★★★

"The top is so lovely, I swear/ Lookin' at you haters like yeah yeah yeah."

By itself that line means nothing; it's the sort of success-porn boilerplate that dominates rap so completely that we don't even notice it anymore. But it's not what you say, it's the way you say it. Lil Wayne has maybe the best voice in rap, and these days his childlike sidelong rasp is so utterly, completely in full mack stride that even on autopilot he's a rabid dinosaur, licking his chops and just waiting for a chance to bite your face off.

Here, he's alongside another of rap's greatest voices, the full-throated bluesy old-man growl of Miami fixture Trick Daddy. Trick says cusswords better than anyone. When he says "fuck," the f is a whistling teakettle: the 'u' is a foghorn moan, and the 'ck' is a car door slamming on your ear. When he calls you a fucking heathen, you feel like a fucking heathen. "Yeah Yeah Yeah" is strictly album-track filler, but its contempt is so strong that you might start hating yourself after you hear it.

Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Thu: 11-16-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Matt and Kim
“Yea Yeah”
[Iheartcomix; 2006]
★★★½
Brooklyn duo/couple Matt and Kim put on one of my favorite live shows this year, though it took another four months to figure out what they looked like. See, the show was at an apartment so crowded that I never saw them set up. Then I couldn't see over the crowd surfers, who were so close to the ceiling, they pushed off it with their sneakers. The police busted up the show before it ended-- the downstairs neighbors must have sensed a cave-in approaching.

This single from their proper debut contributed to that near disaster. "Yeah" can either be a dismissive or an excited utterance, and here it's the latter. Singer/keyboardist Matt shouts the 19 "yeah"s that make up the chorus, twisting each ever so slightly. "Forget your court date," he urges at the start, reminding you of the simple pleasures of juvenile delinquency. It works well with the song's simple one-two beat and keyboard line, but it also shows Matt and Kim's knack for shaping the simplest words and musical phrases into gut-punching, bail-skipping, ceiling-crashing joy.
MP3: Matt and Kim: Yea Yeah
Posted by Jessica Suarez in pop on Thu: 11-16-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Soil & "Pimp" Sessions
“Memai”
[2006]
★★★★

Japan's Soil & "Pimp" Sessions make some of the most insane club jazz you'll ever hear, and "Memai", from their unfortunately Japan-only album, is among their most gleefully psychotic creations. The breakneck beat veers between disco and hard bop, while the horns can't decide between funky stabs, Mingus-inspired joyous fluttering, or ESP-Disk freakout. I don't know what the odd vocal interjections are saying, but it's probably nothing nice, if the paint-peeling trumpet and sax solos they bookend are any indication. As jazz goes this is as edgy and boundary-destroying as anything since the 1970s-- even if it doesn't open a new frontier in jazz, it will at least blow your head.

Posted by Joe Tangari in jazz on Thu: 11-16-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Voxtrot
"Sway"
[Playlouderecordings; 2006]
★★★★

Voxtrot's first two EPs were blustery and muscled, but the limpid Darla compilation track "Warmest Part of the Winter" presaged a more gentle, pensive direction. "Sway" develops the trend: Ramesh Srivastava's voice floats austerely, and with none of amped-up Voxtrot's slightly strained quality; a wafting acoustic guitar is content to unfurl indefinitely instead of ramping up to a crashing crescendo; Jared Van Fleet's swelling arrangement (played by the Tosca String Quartet) augments the song's aura of grave beauty.

Voxtrot write whip-smart pop rock that isn't ashamed to flaunt its influences, so when Srivastava sings about "birds on a sloping wire," it's easy to assume he's paying homage to Leonard Cohen, who seems an obvious inspiration for these expansive musings. The older EPs found Srivastava parsing matters of morality, familial responsibility, and societal role. "Warmest Part of the Winter" was all death and afterlife; "Sway" bundles up all these concerns in three grandiose, but mostly successful, verses.

Srivastava strives to write mature, emotionally complex lyrics, so it's commendable that his ambition only leads him astray once: "The language of loss made me silent as a newborn child/ Because everything moves in a shifting cycle", he sings, combining one nonsensical image (the only silent newborn I can think of is in the Bible) with a vague one. But this same ambition produces a surfeit of finely wrought, deceptively concise images-- "And baby I know I will see you someday/ Building your house on the very street/ That severed your mother's life from your father's land"-- that accumulate a deep emotional resonance as they trace out invisible connections.

Stream: Voxtrot: Sway

Posted by Brian Howe in indie pop on Wed: 11-15-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Rollmottle
"Take a Break"
[SENTRALL; 2006]
★★★★

Southern California chill-house producer (and head of his own label, SENTRALL) Rollmottle makes music for watching sunsets, drinking green tea, and reveling in your own deep laze. Despite the 109 mp3s you still need to download before week's end, there's no need to guilt out over such non-hurried lushness-- "Take A Break" lives up to its title and then some, with milky major-minor chords like Debussy used to do, easy-going shuffle beat, and just the slightest ripple from cosmic waves via the tangerine dreamy brush strokes across the outer edges of the mix. In another age, Rollmottle's music will probably be New Age, though if the field includes the vaguely erotic embrace of songs like this, I'm not going to care what they're called. The single also has a Maurice Fulton remix, though for sheer pillowy loveliness, there's no touching the original.

MP3: Rollmottle: Take a Break (clip)

Posted by Dominique Leone in deep house on Wed: 11-15-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Last Town Chorus
"Modern Love"
[Hacktone; 2006]

★★½

There's a not-too-subtle hubris in turning an upbeat pop song into a slow, solemn, tasteful roots number, as if the latter is more legitimate than the former. But if Megan Hickey didn't do it to "Modern Love", Bowie would have eventually, probably while holding Sufjan Stevens or Joanna Newsom at gunpoint. Hickey, the lone member of the Last Town Chorus, slows "Modern Love" to a "Mad World" crawl and kills the serious moonlight, jettisoning the percolating beat and punctuating horns along with the song's snappy melody. She adds some interesting country elements in their place: guitar, some reverberant keyboard, and the most funereal tambourine I've ever heard. To her credit, Hickey's languid arrangement seems better conceptualized and executed than most fast-to-slow covers, but it lacks anything as adventurous-- or as memorable-- as Bowie's peroxide-yellow hair.

Stream: The Last Town Chorus: Modern Love
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Wed: 11-15-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Grinderman
“No Pussy Blues”
[Mute; 2006]
★★★★
This song'll rub blisters on you. Nick Cave preaches trim and brimstone like the old Bad Seeds, but Warren Ellis from the Dirty Three, Bad Seed Martyn Casey, and Cramp/Bad Seed Jim Sclavunos form a blunter instrument: they aren't made for precision organ extractions, as the current, amorphous Bad Seed line-up is, though they're handy for hitting you about the head and face. For a song about not getting any, they put out plenty here, starting with a typewriter that turns into a high hat and ending with Cave dotting a noisy musical climax with excitable "whoo"'s and "damn"'s (usually my favorite part of any rock song).

Ellis almost steals Cave's thunder, letting loose a blast of violin noise at 1:36, shrill and ballsy by itself, but even harsher when layered like the brainwaves of the seething sexually frustrated. But it's Cave at the pulpit, holding forth with his usual viscera though not without a little humor: even funnier than his out-of-nowhere Marcel Marceau reference is the hint that a certain sex-tape actress/would-be pop star is the object of his ferociously unconsummated lust. "I even petted her revolting little Chihuahua", he confesses. If there's a God above, they'll duet on *Murder Ballads II*, his cocksure growl sidling up to her Martinized coo. Then again, that fantasy will likely remain as unfulfilled as this song's thwarted narrator.

Stream: Grinderman: No Pussy Blues
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in rock on Tue: 11-14-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Ada Jones
“Under the Matzos Tree”
B-Side: Mocean Worker
“Under the Matzos Tree (remix)”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★½
B-Side: ★★★
The Cubs won the World Series about a year after Ada Jones recorded "Under the Matzos Tree". That's just one way in which the world was a completely different place almost 100 years ago. This Edison wax cylinder-- one of 16 left from that less PC age-- was resurrected for Reboot Stereophonics' *Jewface* compilation, a look at Vaudeville's fascination with Jewish stereotypes in the early 20th century. Modern reactions to Jones' ersatz Yiddish ("oy oy"), and the lyrics highlighting the importance of money in love, will likely range from disgust to morbid fascination (and not anti-Semitic nods of understanding, I hope). It bears mentioning that most "Hebrew music", which played to every stereotype, was created with at least some Jewish involvement, and that Jewish audiences mostly got a laugh out of it at the time.

Like many early recordings, this has a gripping, almost hypnotic quality. The background orchestra sounds strange and haunting through the surface noise and distortion, and the recording device was almost certainly

hand-cranked, causing the pitch to wobble through the varying recording speeds.

Mocean Worker takes on the challenge of remixing "Under the Matzos Tree" and comes out smelling of roses. He straightens out the timing and loops Jones' catchiest lines, especially the "Let's mingle/ Jingle jingle" bit, to make an insidiously catchy new tune. It's hard to say where a remix with such an ostensibly racist source can really fit, except as an accompaniment to a historical document-- out of context, it needs a lot of explaining. As a historical document, *Jewface* uncovers an interesting, integral part of our cultural history, one many would have preferred to forget.

Posted by Joe Tangari in vaudeville on Tue: 11-14-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cajun Dance Party
"The Next Untouchable"
[Way Out West; 2006]
★★★
So what'll it be, then, the next Arctic Monkeys or the next Mystery Jets? North London teenage fivesome Cajun Dance Party are the latest indie lads (and lass) to drive the UK kids Kooks-y. First single "The Next Untouchable" hints why: guitars shift on a tuppence from bee-swarming attack circles to sensitive *Room On Fire* chimes, while heavy-breathing Daniel's cracking voice wears wounded passion the way American teens wear braces. Hi-hats splash as if someone were drowning as the song whirs around vague-but-appealing, "regret"-rhymes-with-"cigarette" boy/girl stuff: "Do you really like me?/ 'Cause one and one and one makes three". It's not yet up to the level of Monkeys frontman Alex Turner's perfect slang/youth narratives, but the band's ferocious energy probably kills in concert, and it also does the job here. Not the next Art Brut, though. Just saying.

Stream: Cajun Dance Party: The Next Untouchable
Posted by Marc Hogan on Tue: 11-14-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Game
"It's Okay (One Blood) (Remix) [ft. The Game's Cell Phone Contacts]"
[2006]
★★★

Royal Rumble, 1990. The following comparisons are based on a rough combination of physical appearance, overall attitude, quality of performance on this remix and ability to administer a soul-crushing double chickenwing camel clutch. Jim Jones = Rick Rude. Snoop Dogg = "Macho Man" Randy Savage. Nas = Bad News Brown. T.I. = Mr. Perfect. The Game = Ultimate Warrior. Fat Joe = Dino Bravo. Lil' Wayne = Jake "The Snake" Roberts. N.O.R.E. = Tito Santana. Jadakiss & Styles P = Bret Hart & Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart (The Hart Foundation). Fabolous = Jimmy "Supafly" Snuka. Juelz Santana = Rick Martel. Rick Ross = Akeem. Twista = Earthquake. Kurupt = Red Rooster. Daz = Hercules. W.C. = The Barbarian. E-40 = Honky Tonk Man. Bun B = Dusty Rhodes. Chamillionaire = Haku. Slim Thug = Andre the Giant. Young Dro = Ted DiBiase. Malice & Pusha (Clipse) = Marty Jannetty & Shawn Michaels (The Rockers). Ja Rule = Koko B. Ware.

MP3: The Game: It's Okay (One Blood) (Remix)
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Mon: 11-13-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Magic Numbers
"Take a Chance"
[Heavenly/EMI; 2006]
★★★★
First single from the Magic Numbers' just released (in the UK) sophomore LP *Those the Brokes* puts the harmony-laden London popsters squarely on the side of old-fashioned decency. Not for drunkenly grinding against strangers and ignoring "I have a boyfriend" protestations, they! "Take a chance with a woman who lets you," Romeo Stodart suggests instead. Nervously upbeat "Everlong" down strokes jostle with sister Michele's lulling backing vocals as the song casually drops hook after hook. It's rare that a recording so live-sounding goes beyond elder worship, as this one does, but all is not quite well in Magic-land: "It's a crying shame that the love

won't leave you alone," the Numbers proclaim, bass drum pounding. It's especially a shame this record won't be out stateside 'til, like, next year or something. Plenty of time for Romeo to lose the beard so I can write "hitherto hirsute."

Stream: The Magic Numbers: Take a Chance
Posted by Marc Hogan in pop on Mon: 11-13-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pom Pom Pom Pom
“27”
[Pom Pom; 2006]
★★★½

Pom Pom's 12"'s from this year have been consistently great: *23*, *24*, *25*, and *26* (the anonymous German producer releases everything on his own Pom Pom imprint, using only numerical titles) are models of minimalist, cosmic ambiance, perhaps similar in spirit to Atom Heart or Dutch acid/electro label Bunker Records' brand of lysergic techno. His 27th release follows a similar formula: creepy buildup using all kinds of delay, with simple, yet entirely mysterious chord patterns repeated throughout the tracks. Of course, the 4x4 kick drum is ever present (just in case you wondered whether or not this was supposed to be "dance music"), and if I were an enterprising young DJ on the lookout for something to mind-fuck the patrons of a room with in the wee hours of the morning, I might easily be convinced to insert either the ghostly, space-angel A-side, or the sparse, nu-acid B-side. If I knew this guy's real name, I might even send him a thank-you note.
Posted by Dominique Leone in techno on Mon: 11-13-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Sally Shapiro
“Anorak Christmas”
[Diskokaine; 2006]
★★★★

It's not the giving, and it's not the getting. What I love about Christmas is the romance: Our collective fantasy of Santa Claus, mistletoe, and goodwill toward men. No, Virginia, the dude at the mall with the fake beard *isn't* St. Nick, and anyway Christmas only happens in December to conflict with pagans' midwinter hoedown (the hits just keep on coming, Bill O'Reilly). Still, for a couple of weeks each year, millions of people agree to imagine a better world, or at least get sloshed at holiday parties-- and they can't really be wrong.

A similar romance draws me to Sally Shapiro and her musical winter wonderland. I mean, Shapiro doesn't even exist, at least not by that name; producer Johan Agebjörn's simple digitized textures induce nostalgia for a not-quite-real past I can't even remember. On this faithful cover of a song by fellow Swedish popsters Nixon, Shapiro's ingénue whisper flutters amid candy cane synths and disco beats: "I can't remember my own name, but I do remember yours." It's the snow-day equivalent of danceclub-ready first single "I'll Be By Your Side", and it portends a "perfect kiss." Sure, when you take your headphones off and listen from 18 inches away it all sounds like "60 Minutes", but let's pretend they're sleighbells.

MP3: Sally Shapiro: Anorak Christmas
Posted by Marc Hogan in italo disco on Fri: 11-10-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Imogen Heap
“Glittering Cloud (The Plague of Locusts)”
[4AD; 2006]
★★★★

If you're charmed by either gossamer, keys-and-beats charms or songs about Biblical plagues, you may be smitten with this sub-zero Imogen Heap jewel about locusts, the eighth of 10 plagues God delivered unto Egypt during Exodus. In a move made for Matmos, Heap turns the space between her dispersed vibraphone samples, twinkling bells, and electro beats into a breeding ground for the arthropods, letting the sound of locusts chirp at the track's sonority and her sanity.

But amid tracks from people like Scott Walker, Laurie Anderson, and Rufus Wainwright, all giving their chosen Biblical spurn reverent readings, Heap writes around her subject, pawning the parable of the plague into her own quest for personal transcendence. "Dance, dance/ Take me over glittering clouds," she entreats in the hook, a clean, bouncy tempo infected only by the locusts, which whiz well below her through the chorus, the moments when she's happiest. It works perfectly, adding a blue-collar reading to intentionally high art. There's room to dance, too.

Posted by Grayson Currin on Fri: 11-10-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fat Joe
"Jealousy"
[2006]
★★½

This track presupposes that famed non-dancer Fat Joe is worthy of jealousy. This presupposition is incorrect. He's been living off his dead best friend's reputation for years. 50 Cent turned him into a piece of blubbery gristle without trying. And he looks like the unholy amalgam of a pig and a seal. While I may not own a Lamborghini or reside in a penthouse in Miami, *I'm* not even jealous of Fat Joe. He's equipped with a competent beat here, showcasing a jazzy-- and expensive sounding-- Isaac Hayes sample that the rapper can't begin to do justice. Everything he utters has been chewed over, spit out and stomped on infinite times, rendering it meaningless. While hip-hop perennially stubs its own toe each year by squeezing too many marquee names (Jay-Z, the Game, Nas, Jeezy) into a condensed six week span in the fourth quarter, such top-heavy release strategies have their perks. With all that firepower bombarding shelves simultaneously, there's little chance people will realize Fat Joe has a new album out.

Stream: Fat Joe: Jealousy

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Fri: 11-10-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

UGK
"The Game Belongs to Me"
[2006]
★★★★½

Here's Bun B, loose and gravelly, bottomless drawl hopping all over the track with the easy, matter-of-fact authority of an old gunslinger: "Man, I pull up in your city and get my Bush on/ What is that? Lay down the competition, take they cash, crops, and get my push on." And here's Pimp C, vicious nasal sneer sinking and stretching out into a cold singsong taunt, dispensing practical advice to bottom-feeders: "Trickin' ain't dead/ It just moved to the web." Here's Pimp C's track, heartbeat/handclap drums slowly ticking while woozy guitar plucks and dizzy organs hum away deep in the mix like half-remembered fragments drifting around in your mind when you're the most stoned you've ever been in your life. After a long incarceration and two middling solo albums, there was no guarantee we'd ever get this UGK again, two masters making Texas folk music so deep and resonant it feels like it's always existed, like making this music is just as easy and natural as breathing. Every once in a long while, a veteran doesn't let you down.

Stream: UGK: The Game Belongs to Me

Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Thu: 11-09-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Midnight Movies
"Patient Eye"
[New Line; 2006]
★★★

Midnight movies the late-night cinema attractions are usually some combination of weird and fun, best when they represent someone's undiluted artistic vision or misguided attempt at a mainstream formula. Midnight Movies the "O.C." band falls somewhere in the middle: "Patient Eye" sounds as grimly enthralling as *Donnie Darko*, albeit about as dully aimless as *Manos: Hands of Fate*. The band's psychedelic drone derives from the solid rhythm section and especially Larry Schemel's guitar, which is alternately *Corpse Grinders* and *Dark Crystal* but could use a little more *Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies* (to Schemel's credit, he's a little more *Wild Guitar* on the album version of the song). Gena Olivier's

Modesty Blaise vocals are studiously understated, so that the melody gradually emerges from the mist like the monster in *The Keep*-only less funny. But the band sound like they're still too reliant on easy nostalgia, closer to the ponderous *CQ* than the genuinely spell-binding *Suspiria*.

MP3: Midnight Movies: Patient Eye
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Thu: 11-09-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

"Weird Al" Yankovic
“Trapped in the Drive Thru”
[2006]
★★★½
I refuse to front: "Weird Al" was my hero when I was nine years old. He's on his way back to being my hero with this ridiculous 12-minute parody of R. Kelly's "Trapped in the Closet". It'd be nearly impossible to make it more absurd than the original, but the real stupid genius of it is the way he preserves the over-the-top melodrama of the thing while tossing out the soap opera plotline in favor of two people arguing over dinner and getting, well, trapped in the drive thru. A fistful of lame jokes can't hold back the inspired humanity of it, and there's a bonus moment of weirdness when he flips on the radio and the band veers off into an impromptu version of Led Zeppelin's "Black Dog".

The better you know the original, the more laugh-out-loud moments you'll have as you come across the lines Yankovic didn't change, but in between the chuckles it occurred to me that this is oddly more resonant than "Trapped in the Closet"-- I mean, forget love pentagons, who can't relate to boring evenings watching bad television and trying to decide what to eat? It preserves all the argumentative, vindictive and plaintive traits of R. Kelly's characters-- they scream, interrupt each other, call each other "baby" and get cell phone calls at inopportune moments. Then of course there's the big buildup at the end of part 1: "We drive to the drive thru/ Heading off to the drive thru/ We're approaching the drive thru/ Getting close to the drive thru/ Almost there at the drive thru/ Now we're here in the drive thru/ Here in line at the drive thru/ Did I mention the drive thru?" Biggest missed opportunity: Why aren't they driving a Beretta?

Posted by Joe Tangari in parody on Thu: 11-09-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lil Wayne
“Show Me What You Got (Remix)”
[2006]
★★★★½
"Tryin' to tell you I could kick it like Liu Kang, nigga/ Got that Sub Zero flow, how you want me ma?/ Nigga, get over here like Scorpion."

AZ murders Jay over this beat. The Game murders Jay over this beat. Wayne does not murder Jay over this beat. Without one nasty word, Wayne slices Jay's head clean off over this beat. Then he grinds him through a wood chipper. Then he collects the chunks and smashes them with a two ton Acme anvil. Then he pours lava over what's left. Then he waits until the lava hardens. Then he puts the charcoaled remains into a wooden coffin. Then he buries the coffin. Then he strikes the ground hard with a hammer, causing an earthquake. Then the earthquake swallows the buried coffin. Then the coffin reaches the sizzling center of the earth, where it dissolves into nothing-- like it never even existed in the first place. No, Wayne does not just murder Jay here. This is a fatality.

Video: Lil Wayne: Show Me What You Got (Remix)
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Wed: 11-08-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Kidz in the Hall
“Wheelz Fall Off ('06 Til)”
[Rawkus; 2006]
★★★½

You wouldn't know it from his approach to spelling, but **Kidz** MC and Chicago native Naledge graduated Ivy League (UPenn). The duo's other half, DJ/producer Double-0, is Just Blaze's friend and light saber attack victim in a **video** parodying the fact that he rocks the same "Shaft in Africa" sample Blaze used for a certain ~~Budweiser commercial~~ comeback single.

Here, though, Double-0 cops the classic beat from Souls of Mischief's "93 'Til Infinity", cracking the snare harder and focusing more on the keyboard line than the saxophone. Where Souls' version was muted, this one sparkles.

So does Naledge, whose lyrics interweave perfectly with the music, and with his "flow heaven-sent/ Laced intelligent/ Yours irrelevant" he succeeds where throwbacks like Jurassic 5 fail. How does he do it? He delivers entertaining punchlines ("You can still catch me on the avenue pushing in my baby girl's Civic/ Nah, them ain't 20s, them 10s") in a smooth post-Jay/Kanye flow. He complains about the state of hip hop ("Y'all on the same shit/ Imitate the same hit"), but he also manages to provide an appealing alternative. And his feelings are infectious: He communicates his dedication to the game with a combination of confidence, honesty, and vulnerability I haven't heard since another aforementioned Chicago MC admitted he was so self-conscious, and that guy is doing okay for himself.

Stream: Kidz in the Hall: Wheelz Fall Off ('06 Til)
Posted by Dave Maher in hip hop on Wed: 11-08-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Alela Diane
"The Rifle"
[Holocene; 2006]
★★★★

Alela Diane's dread-filled song "The Rifle" finds a powerful metaphor for feminine sexuality in a story of home invasion, effectively rewriting Neil Young's "Powderfinger" from the daughter's perspective. Over a precisely plucked guitar that sounds both solemn and skittish, the Portland-based singer-songwriter's emphatic vocals detail the rush of confusion and turns "they're coming from the woods/ Oh they're coming from the woods" into a menacing hook. Her narrator is simultaneously enthralled and repulsed by the danger around her, which hints at a dark secret at the song's center. Diane wisely keeps the storytelling vague and impressionistic: Her grave intonations (especially about "too many heavy boots") and the ominous backing vocals imply violence occurring just beyond her words, something too horrible to express directly. This strategic reticence, however, gives the song its particular power as it demands repeat listens.

MP3: Alela Diane: The Rifle
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie folk on Wed: 11-08-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Game
"One Night"
[2006]
★★★½
The Game's weirdness might be the most dependable thing in the music business. We're all well aware of his prowess with proper nouns and compulsive bullshitting, but he still finds ways to surprise us every couple of months. I'm just guessing here, but "One Night" sounds like it was produced by Nottz as a straightforward groupie song. I mean, the chorus is, "I only fuck witchoo on two occasions/ When I'm drunk and I'm high/ I would be broke if I would be witchoo/ That, bitch, why it's for one night," and the piano melody screams anonymous romance. So what does Game do with it? Talks about the homies dipping in his pockets.

No big deal, most rappers talk about whatever they want on a track, but the Game clearly understands the dynamic here, re-orders it, and makes the chorus a much wittier punchline. Yes, I am giving the Game credit as a satirist. Instead of running with bros-before-ho-isms, he calls his homeboys "bitches" and claims heartbreak, talking about putting his friends in nice suits for awards shows and not getting anything in return. He even lent them his Bentley and didn't check the mileage! After his family gets shot at, his friends, instead of offering

consolation, tell him to "keep it real." The Game answers, "Keep it real, my niggas?/ Last year alone I spent 1.5 mil on my niggas." And it's angles like these that make the Game, despite his incessant name-dropping and bizarre antics, one of the most fascinating figures in rap.
Posted by Peter Macia on Tue: 11-07-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Isles
"Flying Under Cheap Kite"
[Melodic; 2006]
★★½
Upon hearing this, Steven Patrick Morrissey promptly hung himself, buried his own corpse, and rolled over in his grave. Johnny Marr shrugged and high-fived Isaac Brock. And four New York lads in Man United jerseys exchanged smug smiles, knowing they had just successfully gang-humped their idols, and man was it good.

But seriously, in a Smiths-free vacuum-- hell, in a Voxtrot-free vacuum-- the Isles' "Flying Under Cheap Kite" is perfectly serviceable mixtape fodder, pleasant and amicable and good-humored, a welcome guest in parlors far and wide. Take it home to mum, she'll love it. And even in a world where the Smiths live on only in recorded form, half-reunions, and Moz, this could serve a purpose, the way your old college buddy's on-again off-again Smiths cover band (The Queen's Men? The Comatose Girlfriends?) serves a purpose for wistful gin-grinners and fanners of fading embers. But when you ape the aesthetic with immaculate precision and then hit us with couplets like, "There's no one knocking at my door/ I don't know what the doorknob's for", you're only spitting on the grave you just robbed.
Posted by Matthew Solarski in indie rock on Tue: 11-07-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Joe Budden
"Club Song"
[2006]
★
Hapless and hopeless, New Jersey also-ran Joe Budden tries the über-literal *Snakes on a Plane* approach with his latest attempt at getting boss man Jay-Z's attention. The shameless tactic may have seemed like a good idea in the summer, when the internet was pumping *Snakes* mania up to impressive new levels of dumb. But after people realized it was more fun to read about people who were reading about *Snakes* (or snakes) than actually watching Sam Jackson and the knuckle-puck guy from *Mighty Ducks 2* fight fake venom, a measly payday said it all. So while Joey isn't a complete moron, he plays one on this track. The mixtape favorite tries to come out of the Storch-style suckfest respectable by working in references to every popular club song of the last five years ("I tried to get baby girl to leave with me/ But she was leanin' back, might've been tipsy"), but the feeble attempt at second-tier wordplay goes nowhere. Forget Def Jam-- Koch wouldn't even fuck with this.
Stream: Joe Budden: Club Song
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Tue: 11-07-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bat for Lashes
"Prescilla"
[2006]
★★★★
Unlike most artists who've earned the Devendra Banhart seal of approval, Natasha Khan is best suited to crafting pop music, as she does on this icy cut from her debut, *Fur and Gold*. It's skeletal in its simplicity-- bass drum, handclaps, harp strums, single-note piano figures-- and for the big chorus she adds a little bit of tambourine and some harmonies. But each of these elements is carefully placed to give the song a bounce that's rarely achieved in this sort of arty pop.

Lyrically, Khan's ambiguous pronouns make it unclear exactly who is speaking and to whom-- or if there is even a distinction between the two-- but she includes enough straightforward lines like, "She wants to live in a place that has a number and a name," that the disconnect between the tricky lyrics and the stark yearning of the music gives the song a Magic Eye quality, making it endlessly repeatable.

Posted by Dave Maher in indie pop on Mon: 11-06-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pony Pants
“Pony Train”
[2006]
★★★½

If you like going bonkers to dirty electro, there's really no excuse for you not being in Philly right now. A city that's already got Diplo, Spank Rock, and Plastic Little seems like it'd be set on sweaty party jams; nevertheless, here's Pony Pants, who make serrated dance-punk with drum machine undercarriages for anarchist kids. The trio does skating-rink pop with terse rhythms and notched guitars, and then caps it with Emily J.K.'s post-Le Tigre vocal anthems. New wave burner "Pony Train" is something of a theme song, shedding light upon the meaning of the band's enigmatic name: "Shake your fine ass in those pony pants" establishes the music's alpha and omega. This one has a big shimmering 1980s sound to it, with throbbing stabs of bass, splashy drum programming, artfully decayed synths, and bright woozy guitar melodies swooping through the brittle track. There's a chant-along breakdown with just bass, handclaps, and a looping chime run that spills grandly back into the song proper with a few stabs of guitar and raygun trills. "Pony Pants got a crush on you," sings J.K., developing the manifesto. Feeling's mutual.

Stream: Pony Pants: Pony Train
Posted by Brian Howe in dance-punk on Mon: 11-06-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Red Heart the Ticker
“Leather Boots”
[self-released; 2006]
★★★½

For a song about PDAs whose central image/hook is "You're naked/ 'Cept your leather boots", "Leather Boots" is surprisingly low-key, its desires contained and even reasonable. Tyler Gibbons-- the male half of Philadelphia-based Red Heart the Ticker-- sings not as the desired or even the desirer; he's not smooth-talking here, or whispering "motorcycle cop" in a lover's ear. Instead, he's a third-party witness to love's confounding spell, which manifests itself in the song's bold, almost over-the-top imagery: "your lover puts a quarter in the jukebox with the heart-shaped mellophone." Robyn MacArthur, the female half of Red Heart the Ticker, coos coyly in the background as the song builds from its folk-pop start to its indie-pop finish, complete with handclaps and synth squiggles, perhaps illustrating the transformative power of their subject matter.

Stream: Red Heart the Ticker: Leather Boots
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner, photo by Doron Gild in indie on Mon: 11-06-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Justin Timberlake
“My Love (DFA Remix)”
[2006]
★★★

In simpler times, this review would have written itself: "Awesomest-dudes-ever, DFA, remixing suckiest-dude-ever, Justin Timberlake? Must be awesome." Only now that guys like me give 5-star reviews to the sucky dude in question, it doesn't leave that much room for the awesome dudes to be awesomer. The best DFA could do was equal the original's awesomeness with their own awesomeness, and, in a surprising turn of events for the internet, Tim and James have merely given us a slightly sucky version of their trademarked awesome.

Call me Coconuts, but just because something is supposed to be awesome does not preclude it from actually sucking. Not that this remix sucks. It's just not that awesome. It's kind of awesome that DFA fronted JT's sucky falsetto and super-sucky lyrics, but I kind of feel like I've heard this bassline/snare combo before, and that sucks. It also kind of sucks that I have to listen to so much of that kinda sucky bassline/snare combo and sort of awesome sucky singing before the kind of awesome mini-breakdown in the middle section. It also might be

awesome that DFA could have given JT the most suckily awesome remix possible because they thought it sucked that he thought they were awesome, but that would be conjecture on my part.

What's really awesome is that some dude already made an awesome edit of the non-sucky parts of the remix and posted it in the comments section of the same blog that leaked the kind of sucky remix of the awesome original. What sucks is that the awesome edit of the awesome song (sucky remix) now sucks because all of the awesome people who made their own sucky remixes of it.

Posted by Peter Macia in pop on Fri: 11-03-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Marit Bergman
"My Love"
[2006]
★

The "No Trespassing" sign is still out front, but clueless singer/songwriters keep sneaking into Sensitive Stripped-Down Covers of Pop Songs Estates. What's funny about this B-side from Swedish star Marit Bergman is that "My Love" is sappy enough without her having to go all Lilith Fair on its ass. The DFA got away with eschewing T.I.'s effortless verse and the druggy rush of Timbaland's synths by bringing some actual ideas to their version, but, lacking those, Bergman can't seem to do anything but take the fun out of the track. So she sets her piano to "echoey," changes the word "date" to "page" (for some awful reason), forgets the entire "toes in the sand" part, and even adds some bored accordion for that extra unnecessary touch. Note to cover-happy singers: not every hot single needs a damp towel.

Stream: Marit Bergman: My Love

Posted by Dave Maher in pop on Fri: 11-03-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Zazen Boys
"Riff Man"
[2006]
★★★½

All the greats fall down: After decades when every rock band worth their opening slot learned to walk by copping "Black Dog", nobody rips off Led Zeppelin anymore. Leave it to J-Rockers Zazen Boys to remind me why plagiarism isn't such a bad thing. This track off their third record (called *III*, as the points keep racking up) is more than enough evidence that not only should more bands be stealing Jimmy Page's already half-stolen riffs, they should be taking the rest of Zep's production too, speeding everything up, and tightening the beats to the point where angular tension becomes drums and wires snapping like the tendons in the turkey leg Bonzo finished before the encore. I've heard tales of live performances wherein they launch right into "Immigrant Song" after this, so it's not like ZB aren't in on the "joke". And really, no joke: This is the jam.

Posted by Dominique Leone in rock on Fri: 11-03-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ghostface Killah
"Ghost Is Back"
[2006]
★★★★

Def Jam cut the throwback fast-rap off *Fishscale* in favor of a Ne-Yo radio shot, and the first leak from *More Fish* makes it clear that Ghost isn't listening to execs anymore, instead borrowing one of the most recognizable and untouchable beats from the "good old days" to sling darts. It's hard to hear the "Juice (Know the Ledge)" instrumental and not see 2Pac's Gumby-cut chasing Omar Epps' suede bucket hat, but if anyone can create new fashion visuals for the street life, it's Pretty Toney: "In your Red Monkey jeans/ You lookin' like a scene/ From Baghdad/ That's bad/ Flag red/ Death bed/ Jive niggas is E/ Crystal methheads/ We pistol/ With the wrist out/ Best threads." Guess which label head wears Red Monkey jeans. It's the same one who might not want his girlfriend to "bang the whole Knicks." As far as beef tracks go, this is bound to start a stampede of internet cattle talking about who? what? and when? Or maybe they'll just talk about how crazy Ghostface is, but have no doubt that Ghost is getting at Jay-Z, and I really hope Jay answers. Or what? Nas gets at Ghost? Raekwon buries Redman? Method Man yells at his mirror? The shit would be like the old dudes in *Cocoon* fighting for the last dip in the pool.

Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Thu: 11-02-06: 06:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Padded Cell
“Theme From Friday 13th”
[Mixed Blood; 2006]
★★★
In the grand tradition of Meco, Deodato, and the theme from *Rocky*, UK duo Padded Cell prove that there's no shame in disco-fying the silver screen's greatest hits. In fact, this track sounds so comfortable in sleaze-disco mode you'd be forgiven for failing to notice it's supposed to be scary. Padded Cell (responsible for one of last year's best nu-Italo moments on the "Signal Failure" 12") keep things simple, milking the already cosmically tinged melody for all its creepy charm, and adding a chubby, synthesized bass line for momentum and good measure. If you've followed the recent crop of beardo/space-disco, you know that a good melody is often hard to find, so it makes perfect sense to adapt readymade, whistle-worthy atmosphere to a track template already primed for motion on the chill side of the moon.

Stream: Padded Cell: Theme From Friday 13th

Posted by Dominique Leone in disco noir on Thu: 11-02-06: 06:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Kylesa
“Hollow Severer”
[2006]
★★★½
Buried among two drum kits running headlong at close-but-veering clips, a crust-and-sludge guitar razing its own progression, and a bass line that nearly seems to forget it should move every 30 seconds, Kylesa gets off easy here for lyrical hokum: “Illusion in sight/ Forthcoming blinding light,” goes the tail end of verse one.

But dismantling Kylesa lyrics is like lamenting Taco Bell’s not-so-fresh lettuce. Is that really why you came here, dude? Instead, this track may be the best, most holistic statement yet of the Savannah quintet’s motif, as dense layers of noise (the first 20 seconds sound like the sub-dead sounds of the opening trifecta of Wolf Eyes' *Human Animal*) jut into driving stretches of scream-and-slaughter. A downbeat midsection multitracks the guitars and finally puts the melodic burden on the bass, but it never sounds technical or staged. Then they move back in for another salvo, making an exit with closing shouts of discontent. Yeah, we hear you.

Posted by Grayson Currin in metal on Thu: 11-02-06: 06:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

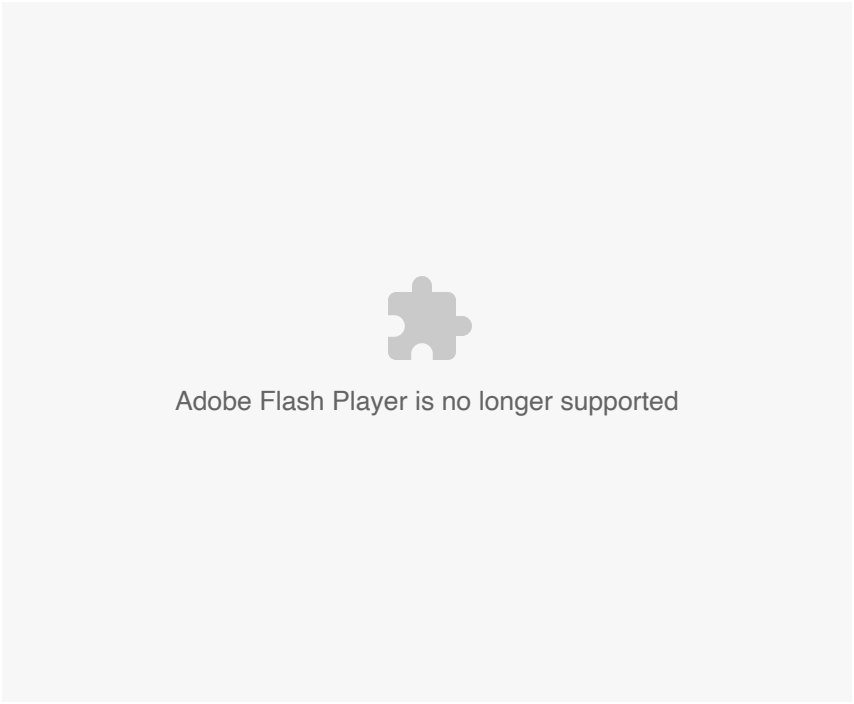
One Ring Zero
“Here Come the Mannequins”
[Barbes; 2006]
★★★
"Here Come the Mannequins" is One Ring Zero's "Welcome to the Black Parade". The song, which opens their new album *Wake Them Up*, is surprisingly dark and agreeably paranoid, but open-ended enough so that its targets are ambiguous. Those soulless bodies in parade lockstep could be greed-blinded big-businessmen, war-mongering politicians, pitch-corrected pop singers, gentrifying hipsters, or whatever enemy is invading the band's Brooklyn neighborhood. Fortunately, Joshua Camp and Michael Hearst leaven their bleak vision of mass conformity with an actual march. A tuba blurts out a bouncy bassline, taunted by a tinkling piano and jaunty woodwinds, and this perky, family-friendly sound only underscores the wickedness of the world and the pessimism with which One Ring Zero sing about it here.

Stream: One Ring Zero: Here Come the Mannequins

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Wed: 11-01-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Brother Kite The Brother Kite
“I'm Not the Only One”
[2006]

★★★½
Providence-based quintet the Brother Kite take a cue from the "less dream, more pop!" heckler, inviting the rosy-cheeked scarf-swingers among us along for a sublime ride comprised almost entirely of bridges and choruses. "I'm Not the Only One"-- from the band's sophomore LP, *Waiting for the Time to Be Right*-- comes charging out of the gate bearing its billowy opening proclamation like a bowed'n'ribboned battering ram aimed at the Wall of Sound. There's reverbed, glistening guitar underpinning the swoops and swells, so somebody's gazing at his/her shoes. But it's not vocalist Patrick Boutwell, whose orations on believers and halos ring bell-clear and with unabashed directness-- to the point that you can practically see his eyes twinkling. The ride's over much too soon, and could benefit from an unexpected twist or two, but seldom does dream-pop soar along with such exhilarating grace and clarity.



Posted by Matthew Solarski in dream pop on Wed: 11-01-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Kellie Pickler
“Red High Heels”
[BNA; 2006]
★★

Despite some surprising successes, the competitive karaoke of "American Idol" still inspires dismally low expectations. Falling somewhere between the highs of Kelly Clarkson and Carrie Underwood and the lows of Clay Aiken and Chris Daughtry, Kellie Pickler neither embarrasses nor distinguishes herself on her debut single. She actually sounds like a lot of other post-Shania Nashville singers, with pipes that are just slightly above average and phrasing she didn't learn from country radio. She also attacks the verses with more gusto than's called for, but her voice sounds thin in the mix and she can't sell the sass on its honkytonk chorus. Ultimately, "Red High Heels" is third-hand attitude-- the chiming guitars siphon off and dilute Miranda Lambert's "Kerosene", a song that cribbed from Steve Earle's "Hardcore Troubadour". But while Lambert's boot-in-yer-ass delivery redeemed her copy, Pickler doesn't provide much incentive not to seek out its ancestors.

Stream: Kellie Pickler: Red High Heels
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Wed: 11-01-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Amerie
“Blow”
[2006]

★★★★½

Conceptually, the r&b mixtape feels like a non-starter. There's some presumptive idea that the act of singing-- the yearning, begging, pleading, moaning, emotional act-- is somehow more difficult than rapping. Hence, to construct an item designed on disposability, as most mixtapes are viewed, built around singing would be a waste of precious ahhhs, ooohs, owws.

Of course, that's all bullshit. Singing is as refined or unremarkable as an artist makes it and similarly, rapping can be as complex and earned as the artist is capable. Amerie, who lacks technical chops, almost always sings the smooth beauty right off her face, just as say, Joe Budden, might rap the ugly right off his grill. I mean this in the best way possible. At this very moment, rap and R&B are nearly synonymous with each other, not simply as radio programming genre-slotter, but also aesthetically and philosophically. A hip-hop producer like Timbaland works tirelessly to create for Nelly Furtado and Justin Timberlake, when he could just as well save his fissures and sine lines for Rich Boy and Ms. Jade. There's a financial upside to the R&B game, certainly. Polow da Don, whose resume you may notice began with a stint in underground organized noize-makers Jim Crow, now fashions gold out of gutter for Fergie and Ciara. To say nothing of Scott Storch, will.i.am, the Neptunes, Swizz Beatz, et al.

And so on "Blow", and its accompanying unnamed mixtape, Amerie surreptitiously indulges the transposition of genres by singing over rap du jour. She sings over all styles, from plinking Southern bounce like Lil Scrappy's "Money in the Bank" to the willowy Eastern yacht-isms of Cam'Ron's "Weekend Girl", so the tape is fitfully designed like any other. It even features vaguely inane, if self-motivating interludes.

"Blow" is, of course, Rick Ross's "Blow", a transcendent swirl of church organs and barrel-chested trombones. It was one of the truly wasted beats of the year-- until Amerie shrieks, "One day I'm gonna blow." Completely reconfiguring Ross's barren coke fantasy into a pipe dream bonanza of a different sort, Amerie peppers her chorus with "Don't know when I'ma make it," a curious insecurity considering Amerie is responsible for what may be the best R&B song of the last half-decade, her frantic "1 Thing". She already has blown, which explains her sturdy execution: Unlike fellow mixtape artists like (say) Papoose, Amerie never feels desperate over important-sounding music, never reaches for something she can't touch.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in r&b hip hop on Tue: 10-31-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Brakes
“Cease and Desist”
[Rough Trade; 2006]
★★½

Another dose of this band's Pixies-laced-with-Clinic medicine yields the same side effects that plagued their first album. Frontman Eamon Hamilton still sounds like Peter Jackson (yes, the director) wheezing *Trompe Le Monde*, the bottoms-up pub-punk is way more asshole than rawking, and the accompanying tale of Satan asking God to take it outside, well, it sounds made up. Whereas last year Art Brut's concurrent release paled the band's shit-eating countenance in comparison, the 2006 Brakes model appears out-smartassed, and out-asskicked, by more muscular releases like the Mclusky compilation and Thermals album. As was the case with *Give Blood*, I'm willing to wear the tattered clothes and pump the requisite fist, but I don't exactly want my punk to be sedated.
Posted by Adam Moerder in rock on Tue: 10-31-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ksis
“Beijos, Blues E Poesia”
[EMI International; 2006]
★★★½

A lovely Brazilian twin-pop ballad, but my Portuguese is rusty, so I have to speculate here. Since Keyla and Kenya Boaventura are sisters, I'm assuming that the plaintive "menina, menina" ("girl, girl") hook is part of a dialogue with someone else. So conceptually they avoid t.A.T.u. and fall closer to a literal twin version of M2M, singer plus doppelganger fighting heartache in solidarity. Musically it's the lighter side of Michelle Branch in brooding acoustic ballad mode, with angst-signifying guitar distortion creeping in at the edges. The blues come

through in their gorgeous vocal melodies, which transcend all language barriers. As for the poetry, maybe not understanding it actually helps. Internet translation sez: "you're the train and I'm the station." Best to sing it in English, then: "Baby, I love you."
Posted by David Moore in pop on Tue: 10-31-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Plans & Apologies
"Two Left Feet"
[Pandaz Pop; 2006]
★★★

It's hard to imagine any freshman guitar band from England escaping Libertines and Arctic Monkeys comparisons, but the influence is readily audible on "Two Left Feet", from Plans & Apologies. The guitar swagger at the outset recalls *Up the Bracket*, only with a nerdy tidiness instead of an inebriated sloppiness, and the self-deprecating tomfoolery looks surprisingly good on a dancefloor, even if the band swear they can't dance. But these comparisons only highlight the band's own drive. Seriously, what's more manic: the singer trying to work in as many syllables as he can, as if the band's started the van without him, or the overstimulated guitar that sounds like a Slinky running down stairs at full speed? "Two Left Feet" is a tightly wound coil that sounds like it's ready to spring open violently. When P&A let that happen, they'll outstrip any comparisons.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Mon: 10-30-06: 12:00 PM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Robyn
"Cobrastyle"
[Konichiwa; 2006]
★★★½
Robyn's back with a new EP, further distancing herself from her long lost proto-Britney teenpop roots (her indie music is better anyway), and "Cobrastyle" is one of its modest triumphs. This version isn't a cover of the Teddybears Sthlm song so much as a total overhaul, an impressionistic abstraction. Only vaguely familiar traces remain in the song's simple synth loop and amorphous gut rumblings for a bassline. Robyn hints at Mad Cobra's delivery with a slight dancehall inflection, but makes it prettier-- everything is prettier, but the arrangement basically serves as an unobtrusive backdrop for Robyn's sweet interpretation. It's also a demonstration of her range, since a few songs later she's belting out Prince's "Jack U Off" like a brat at the back of the bus.
Stream: Robyn: Cobrastyle
Posted by David Moore in pop on Mon: 10-30-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Spanky Wilson & the Quantic Soul Orchestra
"Message to Tomorrow"
[Ubiquity; 2006]
★★★★½
Heavy and way old-school, "Message to Tomorrow" is straight-up, no-nonsense, knock-you-on-your-ass funk with whiplash drums and horns so brittle you swear they could snap at any second. Wilson, who's been at this for decades, is pure soul when she latches onto this beat, singing the simplest damn lyrics you could imagine about "peace/ And no more sorrow." The drum break around 2:10 is waiting for some producer to sample it, and check the muted trumpet solo after the second chorus that shouts almost as loudly as Wilson. I've listened to this track about 100 times last week, and it's so outrageously righteous I think I'll try for 100 more.
Stream: Spanky Wilson & the Quantic Soul Orchestra: Message to Tomorrow
Posted by Joe Tangari in funk on Mon: 10-30-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Spandex
"I Love My V50"
[Sleep Debt; 2006]
★★★★
Cristian Vogel may be moving away from straightforward floor-fillers in his own work, but he's still scratching that itch on his own Sleep Debt label-- or rather letting others, e.g. Spandex, scratch that itch for him. Last.FM

says that Spandex's "Tepid Water" is approximately four times as popular as his "I Love My V50", which only confirms that my listening habits are radically out of step with, like, everyone in the world. (Time to dust off that Minor Threat t-shirt.) Make no mistake, "Tepid" is faboo-- slow and churning over a slothful bassline and an apple-crisp hip-hop beat; the gravelly Speak 'n Spell vox is plenty cheeky too ('cept cheek rarely blushes so blackly). But Spandex, who you may know from his *(Lies)* single on the excellent Hand on the Plow label, really shows his mettle on the 4'33" "V50", which in spite of its track time is hardly quiet. No, it's a relentless, Chicago-flavored banger of a choon, all pointillist chords and hiccups, with demure little synth washes to draw you close and big, ugly 909 claps and snares to smack you back. Nasty.

Stream: Spandex: I Love My V50

Posted by Philip Sherburne in techno on Mon: 10-30-06: 04:00 AM CST | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Arbouretum
“Pale Rider Blues”
[Thrill Jockey; 2007]
★★★★½

My dad and I don't talk about music: Though benign it may seem, the topic almost always means entrapment, normally leaving me with huffs of frustration (Radiohead in high school) or his theory that sales indicate quality (at least he retracted with Eagles vs. the Band). But I never quit the "Eric Clapton: Hack or Hero?" battle, even though it's ruined two family dinners so far.

Baltimore's Arbouretum, then, has been bringing my family together since the 4:27 mark of "Pale Rider Blues", the third track on their Thrill Jockey debut. Dave Heumann's three-minute guitar solo unwinds through quick, flighty, razor-thin strings of notes-- the same fluid melodic motion that makes Dad dig Clapton-- applied in raunchy salvos. But Heumann fulfills the kid who picked up on Neil Young's play-anything aesthetic, too. His phrases twist over and under to avoid resolution, ultimately offering his own hands three options: Find a way out, run out of frets, or keep charging. He clings to a note when its neighbor could end the run, and he haphazardly frets *down* an octave just as the climax nears. Cymbals crush, the bass booms and the song is good, but wow.

MP3: Arbouretum: Pale Rider Blues

Posted by Grayson Currin in rock on Fri: 10-27-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

My Chemical Romance
“I Don't Love You”
[Reprise; 2006]
★★★★

For all the talk of MCR's newfound love of 1970s rock operas and leukemia shortcuts, the most Maxell-tastic blow-dryer-to-the-face track on their new gloomsday LP is firmly rooted in the hair-raising 80s. Heck yeah, it's the band's first proper power ballad and, well, they should definitely think about writing dozens more. Like, tomorrow. Everything's here: the two-tick guitar scratch right before the hook, the muskrat-in-a-trap yelping, the "ahhhh" heaven's gate back-ups, the super-neat Slash-style solo, the take-it-down break, the eat-the-sky big finish. By the book, and better for it. Sure, it starts off exactly like "Yellow", which seems lame after a zillion soccer-dad spins but-- don't get it fucked-up-- "Yellow" is classic power ballad, too. Bonus: The lyrics are actually kinda sorta great. Chronicling the final throes of an abusive relationship, Gerard Way puts on an arena snarl for the chorus: "When you go, would you even turn to say/ I don't love you like I loved you yesterday." Put that cell phone down and pick up a Bic-- this one deserves the real thing.

Stream: My Chemical Romance: I Don't Love You

Posted by Ryan Dombal in rock on Fri: 10-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Charles Latham
“The Internet Sexual Predator Talking Blues”
[2006]

★★★½

Bob Dylan was rarely the hold-hands-and-sing folk writer some imagined: Sure, he wanted the world to be better, but he was a devout individualist, a kid from the Midwest living in *the* city under a new name, trying to make himself happy. His songs spoke less to Peter, Paul & Mary utopianism than his what's-going-on utilitarianism. Fast forward four decades, and "Mr. Tambourine Man" might have been called "I Am Not Afraid of You and I Will Beat Your Ass."

Durham's Charles Latham gets this: In this clever, unavoidable rub on Mark Foley, Latham laments everything, from the conservative stance on homosexuality to Washington's predilection for doling blame. He decries politicians' reproductive rights, and notes that Monica Lewinsky was old enough to smoke that cigar. Over ramshackle acoustic blues, Latham even recommends sterilizing legislators, as if to say pedophilia is this administration's least important lost cause. People can't see eye-to-eye on every issue-- Latham's humor admits that much here. But maybe they could stop fucking with each other.

MP3: Charles Latham: The Internet Sexual Predator Talking Blues
Posted by Grayson Currin in folk on Fri: 10-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Indian Jewelry
"Come Closer"
[Monitor; 2006]
★★★½

Pitchfork rightly spotted Beach House as fall's sweet spirits, but, for some of us, the macro-suck of the present world demands something a bit more surly. The Houstonians in Indian Jewelry seem happy to haunt that space with a song that sounds like screwed-not-chopped Mazzy Star. Better yet, "Come Closer" is like that part in *The Ring* where the cute girl is walking around and then bad stuff happens. Actually, I couldn't watch that movie, but everything about the menacing synth, plodding drums and nails-on-chalkboard guitar scrapes coupled with disembodied boy/girl chants of the titular phrase says spooky to me. There is no chorus or verse or formal structure, the instrumental so evasive and abrasive that your ears grab onto the vocals, which at first seem friendly but with every repetition become more discomforting, like the nice man with the candy. Molester rock? This shit is freaking me out.

Stream: Indian Jewelry: Come Closer (Abridged)
Posted by Peter Macia in noise on Fri: 10-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cory Arcangel
"Tenth Avenue Freeze Out"
[Beige Records; 2006]
★★★½

Moved by the glockenspiel arrangements that flare across Bruce's master panorama, Brooklyn media artist and man-about-town Cory Arcangel decided that he would write his own glockenspiel parts to fit all of the songs on *Born to Run* that don't already feature that instrument. This is the kind of brazen scheme that most folks dream up over bong-hits only to sober up and abandon. But Corey has actually done it, and his tinkling all over the Boss comes off like a heartfelt expression of affection rather than a pomo smirkfest. Particularly here, where Cory's Orientalist cascades respect the chord sequences of the original song while asserting a chilly resilience, a feeling of innocence under siege. Though this is meant to be played in synch with Bruce's record, when listened to on its own there's a Satie-like elegance of execution which turns an absurd idea into a moving one. There's only 300 of these, and it seems like a potential legal no-no, so get hopping.

Beige Records: http://www.beigerecords.com/
Posted by Drew Daniel in wtf on Thu: 10-26-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Escort
"Love in Indigo"
"Karawane"
[Escort; 2006]

A-Side: ★★★★
B-Side: ★★★★
Escort's new release suggests maybe it's not earnestness that distinguishes them from other nu-disco purveyors: Maybe it's a sense of humor. While the A-side, "Love in Indigo", walks and talks and acts like a love song, close listening reveals a torrid affair with shoes à la Carrie Bradshaw, or Imelda Marcos. Alpha-female vocals atop strident arrangements, the song exudes city-girl mettle if not libertine entitlement. The boldness of the twirling, knifelike strings, the conga-burst echoes and swinging sax, suggest a bold facade. So when they fall away, in the final seconds, to leave silence behind the singer, we catch a flash of sotto voce vulnerability-- not to what love can offer, but what new pumps do offer.

Equally playful, the B-side, "Karawane," fuses nightclub savoir-faire and ooga-booga primitivism. Expect no less from a song based on Hugo Ball's Dada sound-poem-- which means its simian yawps and state-of-nature growls emanate from the same surly unconscious behind the Talking Heads' rhythm experiment "I Zimbra". Paired with a percussion fetish that rivals Steve Reich and Niagara combined, the anti-art jabberwocky is hypnotic. Ball heard the thump of an elephant caravan in his verse; Escort heard it, too, and relocated it from the Serengeti to Greenwich Village, 1977, festooning the beats with Rhodes ribbons and guitars masquerading as drums. Late into the song, the caravan heads south, as dusty Tijuana finger-picking and handclaps drift over the phalanx of African polyrhythms. All our highbrow hot air, Escort reminds us, amounts to zero on the dance floor.
<!-- D(["ce"]); //-->
Stream: Escort: Love in Indigo
Posted by Roque Strew in disco on Thu: 10-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Wiley
“I'm a Sinner”
[2006]
★★★★
Various Production's "Hater" *12*" just came out in the States, and I'm already going to tell you it's unnecessary. The day I first heard "Hater" a few months ago, I also read about Wiley killing it with a freestyle. That freestyle was hard to find, but finally, thanks to grime DJ and scene patron, Logan Sama, Eskiboy's "I'm a Sinner" is available for free on Sama's *War Report* mixtape. And Wiley does indeed kill it.

"Hater"'s dubstep-cut pop is reduced to pure grime, the sub-bass rumbles and escalatingly violent synths chopped into a 16-bar loop, the original opening line "I'm a sinner" flipped as a chorus. Over that, Wiley slings three straight minutes of brutal punchlines at the Movement crew's young buck, Scorcher, finishing him (before it's begun) with the opening barrage: "Stay away cuz you don't wanna see careers ending/ Please stop him, he's got record deals pending/ Come to my end just to see if I'm defending." I'm no Logan Sama, but Wiley seems to always have the upper hand in these battles, distilled down to his line here, "I'm the dream you're chasing." Scorcher is game, but Wiley pummels him ruthlessly, and adds another response cut just for fun. Grime may not be trendy anymore, but imagine if Jay-Z still went at every clown who dissed him, ripped up mixtapes because he couldn't help himself, shredded Dipset into clumps of purple chinchilla. That's Wiley.
Posted by Peter Macia in grime on Thu: 10-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The End of the World End of the World
“Last Cast”
[Flameshovel; 2006]
★★★

With the Walkmen wasting away again in Louisiana-ville and the Strokes having nosedived from grace down to *Earth*, this latest posse of fine-feeling, fresh-faced youngsters creeps in to take its own stab at NYC's other contested crown. Vocalist Stefan Marolachakis even has a name pretty much as ridiculous as Leithauser or Casablancas, and a similar leering delivery. Here he enters with the apt taunt, "You can pout all you want/ Some of us won't fall for it," alongside cymbal-heavy percussion that suggests a pack of little leaguers shaking the chain-linked to razz the opposing team. Replace his "you" with an NYC band of your choice for a tasty beef soufflé.

And for a good three minutes the End of the World has us, holding "Last Cast" slightly aloft, taking it for a few well-timed dips and across a steady bridge, Marolachakis' elongated vowels gluing the whole thing together. Yet where the above acts boast five, the End are only three, and their basic guitar-bass-drums template gets stretched thin here-- there's really no reason "Last Cast" needs to stagger well past the four-minute mark, and all that constant fence-rattling grows tiresome. The result: a fine but by no means monumental candidate for the back half of the next *Yes New York* comp.

MP3: The End of the World: Last Cast
Posted by Matthew Solarski in indie rock on Thu: 10-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Gwen Stefani
"Wind It Up"
[Interscope; 2006]
★
What's really awesome about this song is Pharrell Williams's evolution from "Liberace fingers" to Liberace insanity, sampling the *The Sound of Music*'s "The Lonely Goatherd" and flipping it into the most punishingly ludicrous club jam since "The Ketchup Song". I would indict Chad Hugo, as well, but this has the stink of a Skateboard P creation á la jeans with a neon panther on the crotch. He's got Gwen yodeling and groaning all over this mess, and she will undoubtedly be backed by some horrifyingly miswardrobed Gestapo girls in the video. But her moronic "street slang" is completely secondary to the rattling beer steins and clippety-cloppety clogdancing of which the beat is almost entirely constructed. I mean, I get it, you've run out of ideas. It's the Age of Chaos and all, but in what club outside of the Epcot Biergarten would this be hot? And what numbskull outside of the lederhosened Floridians earning $7 an hour to wiggle and slap their fat asses in said Biergarten would want to dance to such a clutzy and cartoonish song? Is this Fergie's fault? Is Fergie the goatherd? Who is the goatherd?
Posted by Peter Macia in pop on Wed: 10-25-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

50 Cent
"Puppy Love"
[2006]
★★★½

For every announcement for the next Tony Yayo album or a new line of 50-embossed dildos, something like "Puppy Love" comes along-- something worth caring about. He churns out so much hot garbage that it's easy to forget that 50 is still one of the greatest rappers in the world. Softbatch and knowingly so, 50 goes with romantic nostalgia here, waxing about young love, abortion, neighborhood violence and promiscuity. Who knows how much truth he's telling, the point is that we believe him. His conviction, somehow, rings true ("I just love 'em and leave 'em I don't give a fuck/ I mean she ain't give a fuck, she had a nigga in my truck"), revealing vulnerability and playing flossy boss at once. He even shouts on the outro, "They made me like this!" All this happens over boomerang slide guitar, tickled piano keys and a so-tired-it's-hot chipmunk loop. Next time 50 says he has a proclamation to make, take a rain check. But the deep cuts you still need to check for.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Wed: 10-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Prins Thomas
"Fehrara"
[Full Pupp; 2006]
★★★★
Prins Thomas's "Fehrara" packs more diversity than your run-of-the-mill cosmic mishmash. Coursing below high-pitched chirps, like a deep spring, is a subterranean synth gurgle. Soon Prins twists it into a light melody, then rolls it into a heavy groove. Sure, "Fehrara" molds all of the usual Berlin/New York raw material into krauty space disco. But Prins widens the geography du jour, cribbing from Chicago acid tests and Kingston's roomy dub. Despite the salad-bowl aesthetic, the track stays smoothed-out and stark: little more than dirty notes

ricocheting over clean drums. Sticking to the bare necessities-- all while evading the "minimal" tag-- rarely sounds this good.
Posted by Roque Strew in space disco on Wed: 10-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lil Wayne
“Stuntin' Like My Daddy [ft. Baby]”
[Cash Money; 2006]
★★★★
At first listen, it's rote, lazy money-talk, and yet another example of Weezy's creepy insistence on referring to Birdman, the guy who runs his record label, as his father. But this thing is on the radio all day anymore, so there is no first listen, and it sneaks up on you. Most of that is producer TMIX's track: drums collapsing over each other, itchy synth bleeps, tubas blaring away underneath everything. Urgent and insistent, it punches through mental defenses. It takes more time to really notice Wayne and Baby, since their voices are buried so deep in the track. Wayne's on a ridiculous roll right now, using his bleary croak like a cartoon sound effect; "Where I'm from we see a fucking dead body everyday" comes out souding like "Way a fum we see a fuckem day body ay-day," and it's not unintentional. He's sinking deep into his New Orleans accent, letting it pull his words around. And he must be teaching Baby how to rap, because the old man sounds like he's learning to cross a stream by jumping from rock to rock, flitting around the beat instead of bulldozing it. On the hook, they toss words back and forth like hot potatoes. And maybe that's why it doesn't sound like much at first listen; it just seems too easy.
Stream: Lil Wayne: Stuntin' Like My Daddy [ft. Baby]
Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Wed: 10-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Luciano
“Bla Bla Bla”
B-Side: EAT
“Mission Elevator”
[Diamonds & Pearls; 2006]
A-Side: ★★★
B-Side: ★★★½
Quietly poking along since 2003, Berlin's Diamonds & Pearls label increased its profile earlier this year with a split single from Ricardo Villalobos and Henrik Schwarz; it follows up with a split from Luciano, of Cadenza/Perlon/Playhouse fame, and EAT (aka Morten Cargo & At Ease, who under one alias or another have contributed to five of DNP's six singles so far).

Luciano's side is unsurprisingly long (11 minutes) and loopy, easygoing but somehow set on pins and needles. The hard reverb that hangs over insistent clap patterns suggests a sense of confinement that runs counter to his customary expansiveness, and dark vocodings temper any runaway tropical inclinations Luciano's endlessly twitching syncopations might otherwise indulge. With little variation, aside from an ever-growing buzz of presumably field-recorded voices, traffic and crying children, this free-flowing, slightly paranoid prelude is the kind of thing Luciano can turn out in his sleep, and given the track's blasé title, he probably did. Only difference between him and us: His nightmares are worth putting on tape.

Dark horses EAT turn out a track even more nakedly ominous, and whose attack on the senses is, if anything, more finely honed, wielding great, Bpitchy synth vamps and steely atmospherics. Headbanging repetitions play out against the subtlest modulation tweaks, making it the rare tune that should appeal to both Justice-meters and minimal's detail obsessives. What EAT have in common with Schwarz is that their contributions arguably trump Luciano's and Villalobos's, respectively, making DNP a label that not only banks on big talent but holds its cards close to its vest, playing a surprise with every hand. With the upcoming *Silverbird Casino* compilation featuring Cassy, Dimbiman, Matt John, Sleeparchive and Soundstream along with DNP 5 and 6, it's anyone's guess what the label has up its sleeve.
Diamonds & Pearls: http://www.dnp-music.com/
Posted by Philip Sherburne in techno on Tue: 10-24-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jarvis Cocker
“Black Magic”
[2006]
★★★

Jarvis Cocker was a master sadist, the man who let a girl sleep in just so he could see her shame in the morning. *This Is Hardcore* and *We Love Life* helped shake that image, but neither hold up to the ash-in-your-hair meanness of *Different Class*. Somehow, regret sounds better on "Black Magic", which (unregrettably) swipes both the wall of voices from "Crimson and Clover" and the ba-ba-bum-ta Crystals/Ronettes beat for the verses. Cocker sings in semi-penitent bon mots that don't seem regretful per se ("We're born to die/ But I'm gonna give it a real good try") over "Clover"'s shimmery chords, slowly layering in fuzzy bass and synths over the course of the song. Cocker hears "all the bells" ringing on Sunday morning, and they make for a fine instrumental break, but he hears them from the comfort of his bed, not from inside the church. Clean living is something that can be put off another day. Besides: "It's the true believers that crash and burn."

Posted by Jessica Suarez in rock on Tue: 10-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Killer Mike
“Comin' Home Atlanta”
[Purple Ribbon; 2006]
★★★★
Most of *I Pledge Allegiance to the Grind*, Killer Kill's monstrous new double CD, is devoted to the kind of splenetic wounded-pride fire-breathing we're getting used to hearing from unjustly overlooked rappers. But opener "Comin' Home Atlanta" comes from a sunnier place. Over gently rolling pianos and plinking xylophones, a pleasant Killer talks about landing on the tarmac in the place where he most feels like himself, and calls out the name of every neighborhood he can think of, none better than another. That joy stays there even as his thoughts turn dark: "Same crackers that was making laws was in the projects buying raw/ And this ain't what I heard, folk; this here what I seen and saw." As the song's one verse continues, things get progressively fucked: "I know you heard we kidnap children and kick down doors on mama's home/ But, man, that's only when the drought is on." Well OK then. Underneath it all, he's still breathing fire.
Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Tue: 10-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tone Ghosting
“Castle Changes (Spastic Rev Remix)”
[Sockets CDR; 2006]
★★
Washington, D.C.'s Tone Ghosting (aka Jeff Bagato) can trick you into believing he's a master tape manipulator, which, entertaining as those manipulations usually aren't, is still a skill. It's a good imitation, so ask yourself if it matters that his techniques are more involved than pulling tape through a typewriter: Bagato uses an unpatented technique of running hacksaws over throwaway vinyl while pressing a microphone against its flipside. This remix, the fifth of nine on the EP, combines vinyl sawing with looping and feedback, while creaking doors, hallway echo, and what sounds like self-flaggelation creep in the background. It's not hard to imagine a lone clinician fishing wrinkled tape slices out of a garbage can, smoothing them down for dissection, then tossing them away again with passive cruelty. Now, ask yourself, did you hear them before or after the dissection? It's hard to hear without seeing Bagato live, and since this EP was limited to 100 copies, it's hard to hear without seeing Bagato live.
Posted by Jessica Suarez in noise on Tue: 10-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pink Nasty
“Don't Ever Change [ft. Bonnie Prince Billy]”
[self-released; 2006]
★★★★

Be not dissuaded by the opening seconds, during which Pink and Bonnie mimic the limp harmonizing-with-guitar that characterized the leaner chunks of Oldham's last three proper albums, because "Don't Ever Change" erupts into a conventional trot that belies its antic sidestepping of call-and-response codependency ballad-muck. Pink's maddeningly radio-normal voice is perfectly suited for this tussle-in-surrender's-clothing, and the compound cliches ("you took a stand/ against the odds," "you know that I love you/ and words can't describe this feeling that I'm feeling") accumulate only when given permission by prettily sung disses ("please, baby, won't you shut the fuck up") or concrete/idiosyncratic observations about ATMs, garbage day, and deodorant stains. The music grows more ironically passionate as the couple's yays and nays clash, building to a mutual demand that each declare their undying love eleven times. "Don't Ever Change" slyly and even sweetly captures almost everything that is cozy, limiting, controlling, and casually insane about rent-to-own monogamy.

But wait: Why can't Oldham's voice always be produced this crisply? Why'd he wait for a spoofy duet to unclench his teeth, uncockring that muffled warble, and belt again like he did back when he first earned our fandom? Pink Nasty deserves credit for being the first of Bonnie's many female partners (on wax) to obscure who's musing who.

MP3: Pink Nasty: Don't Ever Change [ft. Bonnie Prince Billy]
Posted by William Bowers in indie on Mon: 10-23-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Shins
“Phantom Limb”
[Sub Pop; 2006]
★★★½

Even before, well, you know, the Shins were tops among indie rock's well-meaning sweethearts. They're still endearing on "Phantom Limb", but there's this sorta punk vibe to the single-- more-electric guitars, tambourines, a straightforward beat-- that smartly foils the song's depressed sentiment. The song recounts a night out on a rural northwest town; highlights include shooting lambs and looting houses. And these here "phantom limbs" stand for, among other things, the legs of sheep grazing over week-old snow-- a "Sunday ham" of white fluff wandering through a field. Mercer brings this flocked sheep metaphor back to the life of the narrator-- "a family portrait circa '95"-- and the town itself, and man that sounds sorta glum, doesn't it. The single is noticeably heavier than usual for the Shins, as if this is their way of announcing that more quote mature material is en route. Are we ready for this? Somewhere, Natalie Portman's head is exploding.

Posted by Andy Dubbin in indie on Mon: 10-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Rock Plaza Central
“My Children, Be Joyful”
[Rock Plaza Central; 2006]
★★★★½

Rock Plaza Central will inspire endless Neutral Milk Hotel comparisons, due to Chris Eaton's venue-filling caterwaul and the band's liberal use of brass. The band sounds like a church pick-up group, fingering their way through an excited offertory, gaining more momentum as they add instruments. Eaton's endearingly off-note vocals career heavenward as he hits those la-da-da-da's between the choruses, rushing to a moment of honest indie transcendence that loses only a little of its power when removed from the context of the album (where its quick build doesn't sound so rushed). The song unravels over several more minutes from there, as the horns dash out a morse-code melody, led by a fervent gospel tambourine and a lovely violin caught in the eddies of a river baptism. It builds dizzingly and winds down beautifully-- truly something to be joyful about.

Stream: Rock Plaza Central: My Children, Be Joyful
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Mon: 10-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

El Perro del Mar
“Shake It Off”

[The Control Group; 2006]
★★★½

When we left El Perro del Mar's Sarah Assbring-- at the end of her self-titled Memphis Industries debut LP-- she was nursing her heartbreak and cooing Sam Cooke to herself, backsliding into misery like it was her default setting. So this bonus track from the American release of the album is like one of those DVD-only alternate endings, adding an epilogue to her story of devastating heartbreak and weary recovery. On "Shake It Off"-- originally released on a 2004 split 7" with Jens Lekman-- she's struggling to find an emotional foothold, trying to fend off her disappointment with a little self-awareness ("I say that I do but I don't"). She's still using 1960s candypop accessories for melancholic ends: the folky acoustic guitar mic'ed so the slide of fingers against frets is audible; the handclaps and ooh-la-la backing vocals that sound tauntingly downcast; the trembling-chin vocals intoning "sh-sh-shake it off" as if dimly recalling a happier song. It's a whisper of a coda-- a long, slow pan that reveals El Perro del Mar alone in a crowd, sobbing along to the radio.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Mon: 10-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Beirut
“Elephant Gun”
[Ba Da Bing / 4AD; 2006]
★★★★

Beirut's Zach Condon co-opts locations, wears them like hats. So *Lon Gisland*'s single space renders one of the most boring islands on earth into something exotic for him, and it finalizes his move from his hometown in New Mexico to Brooklyn; it's the first time he's named something after a place where he really lives. "Elephant Gun" begins with the same little ukulele chords from "Postcards From Italy" and it has a similar marching beat, with similar instrumental breakdowns placed strategically throughout the fuller, more present accordion and drums. But Condon's voice and instrument are almost the same now: His trumpet's vibrations are extensions of the natural ripples in his voice, while his voice's quick pitch changes are smooth and controlled, making him sound more mature than he looks. Otherwise, there aren't many clues to his growth on the EP. Condon declared a disinterest in lyrics in his Pitchfork interview; he only thinks about sounds. It's promising, then, to hear him learning to use the sounds of words to build lyrics that, if not smart, still slide. "We drink to die, we drink tonight," with its assonance and dipthonged [I] vowel, complement his lithe voice. "If I was young, I'd flee this town," he sings. He's getting older by the second.
Posted by Jessica Suarez in indie rock on Fri: 10-20-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Voxtrot
“Your Biggest Fan”
[Playlouder; 2006]
★★★½

For a band that has rarely moved past a midtempo, danceable shimmer, Voxtrot don't shy away from making pop complicated. The four verses of "Your Biggest Fan" ride a blazer-pocket bassline and a minor British blues guitar spit, all nice and easy and almost innocent, like Zack Morris and Kelly Kapowski doing the awkward-Anglo at senior prom. That quad is split in half by a pre-chorus and a segued chorus proper, and it feels as though the fourth verse is going to fall to the same tip. But then they flex. The pre-chorus-- static piano plinks, throbbing bass flourishes and no-splash cymbals-- goes post, toppling back onto the chorus and driving Voxtrot into a blazing-guitar, three-part bridge. It's one of their loudest, most insistent moments to date. Voxtrot detractors say that the Austin quartet just seems petty and too light. "Your Biggest Fan" doesn't counter that argument, but a three-minute pop song about fear of commitment doubling as a workshop on the capabilities of understated pop doesn't have to look for scraps.

Posted by Grayson Currin in indie pop on Fri: 10-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Jim Jones
“Ring the Alarm (Jay-Z Diss)”

B-Side: Loon
“Jimmy (Jim Jones Diss)”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★
B-Side: ★

In the name of bringing five-borough rap back from the brink, Diddy is revolutionizing YouTube by-way-of fast food, and Jay-Z is saving water in Africa. These overachievers need to take a step back though-- their sweat is unbecoming. While they're toiling, Jim Jones-- Dipset's resident Elmer Fudd-- is snatching the city on the strength of a single word, emphasized just so: BALLIN'. The infectious adlib is the sole reason why his single "We Fly High" slowly crept from mixtape blog fodder to Hot 97 repeater to the Billboard 100-- where it debuted this week-- in the last five months. Somehow, Jim Jones is the current King of New York™.

Naturally, that distinction says as much about the birthplace as it does about Jimmy. Still, he's wearing the paper crown well. "Ring the Alarm" has him standing ground ("I brought New York back, niggas tryin' to take the credit-- dead it") and reminding people of his career peak ("I ain't tryin' to offend nobody, but ever since I said ballin' [BALLIN'] I guess niggas think this shit is a sport") while diagnosing Mr. Kingdom's limping return ("It's them stiff knees"). The fact that it registers at all is a triumph. And the guy isn't only dishing, he's taking with aplomb. Just as Jones begins to knock down Loon's awful baiting in a recent video interview, something spontaneous and magical happens: "We Fly High" starts playing on the radio. Jimmy's reaction must be seen. Who says jesters can't rule?

- **Stream: Jim Jones**: Ring the Alarm
- **Stream: Loon**: Jimmy

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Fri: 10-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Willie the Kid
“Live at the Regal”
[2006]
★★★
He's a self-proclaimed "superstar in Grand Rapids." And, while being the top dog of Michigan's "Furniture Capital" may sound like a dig rather than a boast, Willie really is proud of his hometown status. Reared by his brother, Wu associate La the Darkman, this MC embodies a distinct hunger reminiscent of a more level-headed Ghostface. Now under the DJ Drama-led Aphilliates umbrella, he's got the right friends to bubble. Whether he actually will is a tough call. He admirably didn't fuck up consecutive white hot flashes from Wayne and Freeway on *Dedication 2*'s crushing "Cannon" this spring, helping to make it one of the best hip-hop posse cuts of the year. Yet, his acumen gains and wanes. "Live at the Regal" isn't Willie's best, but it flaunts teasing glimmers. "Money in my mattress, I sleep on Wachovia," he says, "Bank of America-- my sock drawer." His desperate delivery is worn in by a lonesome blues lick and swooning bows that plead old soul. "I think like Barack Obama/ The Dali Lama of the polyrhymer-- it's Willie." He's still got a distance to go, but there's reason to be cautiously optimistic about a legit 2008 run from this Midwesterner.

- **Stream: Willie the Kid**: Live at the Regal

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Fri: 10-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Long Blondes
“You Could Have Both”
[Rough Trade; 2006]
★★★★

Until now every brief but tantalizing mp3 the Blondes have released siphoned from the source of least resistance. Whether copping stiff upper lipped post-punk ("Autonomy Boy"), beefed up girl group ("Once and Never Again"), or glossy new wave ("Giddy Stratospheres"), nailing the genre's only been a matter of clearing out enough space in the garage. "You Could Have Both" scoffs at that notion, however, reaching for the kind of clean production that Dad's tool chest just can't provide.

Like Frank Black refining early Pixies' simian stomp into the cultivated *Bossanova*, the Blondes put on airs but the proletarian imperfections still shine through. While the interlocking bass and surf guitar lines scream Kim Deal/Joey Santiago tag team, these guys can't hide the Britannia in them. Staying true to lead singer Kate Jackson's self-proclaimed "glamorous punk" image, "Both" stays more loyal to Pulp's or British Sea Power's Pixies interpretation than the touchstone itself. No longer spinning yarns in a tinny soundscape, Jackson unfurls her narrative buttressed by howling synths and a dizzying chorus. Perhaps they're deliberately rolling out the red carpet before the debut album drops, but it's their gala and so far the hors d'oeuvres taste good.

Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Thu: 10-19-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Peter and the Wolf
“Silent Movies”
[The Worker's Institute; 2006]
★★★½

Peter and the Wolf's Red Hunter delivers heartfelt verses to no one in particular, "singing to the stars" with nothing but a guitar and an occasional female voice (Dana Falconberry) behind it all. The "silent movies" in question are his memories of "a girl [he] knew, who lived up on Seventh Avenue," something like an American Emily Kane, though Hunter doesn't need to shout to make his point, trusting the force of his softspoken nostalgia. There's humor here-- Hunter actually howls like a wolf at one point-- and Falconberry's harmonies remain mostly wordless, as if to play out the girl Hunter misses, and to underscore their distance. It's Hunter's gritty, untrained voice that makes the song though; when he sings "I truly believe we'll fall in love again someday," and "I can't stand it" together with Falconberry, we're stuck wanting to believe him, knowing the improbability, and wondering whether it would be that good for either of them anyway.

Posted by Andy Dubbin in indie rock on Thu: 10-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Rex the Dog
“Maximize”
[Kompakt; 2006]
★★
In his words, Rex the Dog's new exercise in stompy, trancey techno is "another tune for jumping, not for chin stroking." Don't expect IDM, he says-- as if to suggest that his stuttering analog synthesizers are populist tools unsuited to building Brian Eno's furniture music, these feet were made for dancing, etc. "Maximize" need not be meditative, fine, but it could use a thought: The outsized squelched synths bring their jockstraps to the stadium but forget the hooks at the hotel, hoping predictable "anthemic" bombast will cover up the cheesy stink left over from the blockrocked 1990s. More Ferry Corsten than Kompakt; more Jake Williams than Rex the Dog.
Posted by Roque Strew in techno on Thu: 10-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Memory Band
“I Wish I Wish”
[Peacefrog; 2006]
★★★★

If the Memory Band's eight-minute take on traditional British folk song “I Wish I Wish”-- transcribed in *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* in four verses-- seems tedious, redundant, and long-winded, you're halfway there. A case study in expository text-painting, the song opens with an acoustic guitar drifting between two chords. Two more acoustics follow, walking the same thumbed-bass, strummed-string slouch, always a fraction of a beat or a flat-to-a-sharp off. Those humdrum circles become concentric when Nancy Wallace-- here, her voice purposefully mundane-- sings that she would rather be a maid than a married nobody, rather buried in the cold, hard ground than a trinket.

But here's where the strings come in: Violin and viola-- droning the same groan, supported by a willfully metronymic, humdrum kit-- guide Wallace through verses three and four. When she finishes the fourth, the violin

snags the lead and twists in convulsions, its whiny pitch a head heaving beneath a newly resolute, defiant body. But it finally settles, and Wallace repeats verse one. As the bows and guitars resign themselves to domestic duties, you have to hope Wallace's chores end soon.

Stream: The Memory Band: I Wish I Wish
Posted by Grayson Currin in folk on Thu: 10-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Isolée
"Hermelin"
[2006]
★★★★

Just a little over a year since *We Are Monster* convinced indie kids that house music could *too* be cool (that is, the deep, funky, non-ironic, and/or non-French stuff), Isolée is back with new material. Finally. A few remixes, reissues of *Rest*, and the singles collection *Western Store* all made for good holdovers, but the fans among us wanted to know how he was going to follow up *Monster*'s oozing, moldy tech-soul-- would it retreat into sterility, or go full-blown Penicillin?

The good news-- well, aside from the very fact of the release, and the fact that it's predictably outstanding-- is that Isolée's unlikely U.S. crossover success doesn't seem to have poked as much as a dimple in his poker-faced funk. Pursuing his own weird dream of disco, with no truck for those unremembered 1970s, Mr. Müller draws yet another handful of bright, nubby yarn into a Cat's Cradle of tangled counterpoints that are at once grownup-inscrutable and childlike-wondrous. Just as *Monster* provided framework after framework for misfit musical elements to shelter together, "Hermelin" stakes out the modal equivalent of détente, as two or three base chords agree to disagree and a gangly little guitar riff goes zooming over the frontier to sniff out dissent. His kick/snare/hat trifecta is predictably rocksteady, but all the other rhythms here are all fret and grumble, big scabby handwringers spewing flakes with every rotation. Instead of *Monster*'s knotty structures, though, this track just keeps unspooling in a wobbly line-- no looping back, no wavering, as if to acknowledge: Keeping the peace is a tricky business.

Posted by Philip Sherburne in tech house on Wed: 10-18-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lexx
"Sirocco"
[Bearfunk; 2006]
★★★★
Hijacking kraut's incantatory rhythms and poetics of space, Zürich's Lexx appears at the crest of the new wave of disco. Like Reverso 68, his understated cosmic blend overwhelms easy Paradise-meets-Neu! flowcharts, and squares more neatly with Brennan Green and Lindstrøm's lounge outings. But "Sirocco", Lexx's new single, also vibes tropical, replete with tapping congas and watery, glowing Rhodes purls. Flecked with scudding, summery guitars, the song's devil-may-care groove takes the dimensions of a seaside liaison. When bubbles pop halfway into the track, and a flock of "Boys of Summer" seagulls, returning from the intro, shrieks in the distance, it veers unassumingly into musique concrète. At that moment, "Sirocco" moves from balmy to scorching, ablaze with the furnace fire of its namesake.
Posted by Roque Strew in disco on Wed: 10-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Never
"When You're Gone"
[Daytrotter; 2006]
★★★
The Never are a young North Carolina band who, on their recent album *Antarctica*, worked the same grandiose indie rock seam as Death Cab for Cutie and the Decemberists. Musically, there's not a lot to this unreleased *Antarctica* track, recorded live for Daytrotter. It's a stately jangle with popping percussion that opens up into an electrified, hand-holding chorus, swaying drunkenly in the Catfish Haven style of white boy soul. As is always

the case with such bare-bones indie rock, the song's success hangs on how much melodic lucidity and emotional oomph the Tunnell brothers can pack into their bell-clear harmonies; it's on this score that "When You're Gone" succeeds. It's also an interesting counterpoint to the relentlessly idealistic *Antarctica*-- with lines like, "My apartment's just your parking lot/ You leave me when you're done," the Never begin to probe the fissures in their romantic idyll, and one gets a poignant sense of a youthful bubble on the verge of its inevitable explosion.
Posted by Brian Howe in indie rock on Wed: 10-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

George Strait
"Give It Away"
[MCA Nashville; 2006]
★★★★

Are any artists as dependable as country artists? George Strait has logged more than 50 No. 1 country hits across 25-plus years, and still he's spitting out solid singles like "Give It Away", which is actually not a Red Hot Chili Peppers cover. In his monumentally trusty, aw-shucks voice, he speaks the verses, describing in an almost flippant tone how his wife walks out on him and doesn't want to split their assets-- not the diamond ring, not the trailer, and especially not the bed "where all our love was made." He doesn't have to change his speaking voice very much to sing the choruses, nor does he have to lose his cool exterior to play downbeat and dumped. Despite the marital ruckus, the music remains even-keeled, playing up the brokenhearted defeat and setting up a surprise ending that has all the ironic sting of that "Twilight Zone" episode with Burgess Meredith and the apocalypse.

Stream: George Strait: Give It Away
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Wed: 10-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Gojira
"Ocean Planet"
[Prosthetic Records; 2006]
★★★★½
For being named after a clumsy Japanese monster that knocked over buildings, this metal four-piece from France is immaculately precise, curiously at ease, but no less magnificent. They roar from the gates on "Ocean Planet", the behemoth that opens their third and only-recently stateside *From Mars to Sirius* LP. Time stops as Christian Andreu's split-second, one-note whale cry (implied by guitar but sampled in the intro) surfaces, a sea beast emerging from deep, heavy and swift seas. The first three minutes move in lumbering, beautifully awkward waves. But the drums finally snag and thrash for stability, a relentless double-bass pulling up only 45 seconds later, allowing final air for the guitar and Joe Duplantier, screaming about destroyed dreams and caged lives. It's the kind of rarified metal diorama that works in six minutes, no need for 60.
Posted by Grayson Currin in metal on Tue: 10-17-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Amerie
"Take Control"
[2006]
★★★
The line on Amerie is she's a second-tier R&B diva, yet somehow she always manages to put out singles that Beyoncé would, and probably has, killed for. "Take Control" is another one. While B was busy sobbing in videos and making the campiest record since the *Hedwig* soundtrack, Amerie went subtle. Co-produced with Cee-Lo, the guitar riff admittedly bites Cake, but by the time Amerie's tied-up-in-silk singing darts around those licks, you hopefully won't be thinking about bald white dudes, unless that's your jam. Amerie isn't treading new ground lyrically, but I don't think anyone expects that from her. She's making a hot little 80s funk throwback concept record, her voice and the production both feigning the strain of submission for fun instead of channeling neuroses through melisma.
Stream: Amerie: Take Control
Posted by Peter Macia in r&b on Tue: 10-17-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Flying Lotus
“Pet Monster Shotglass”
[Plug Research; 2006]
★★★★

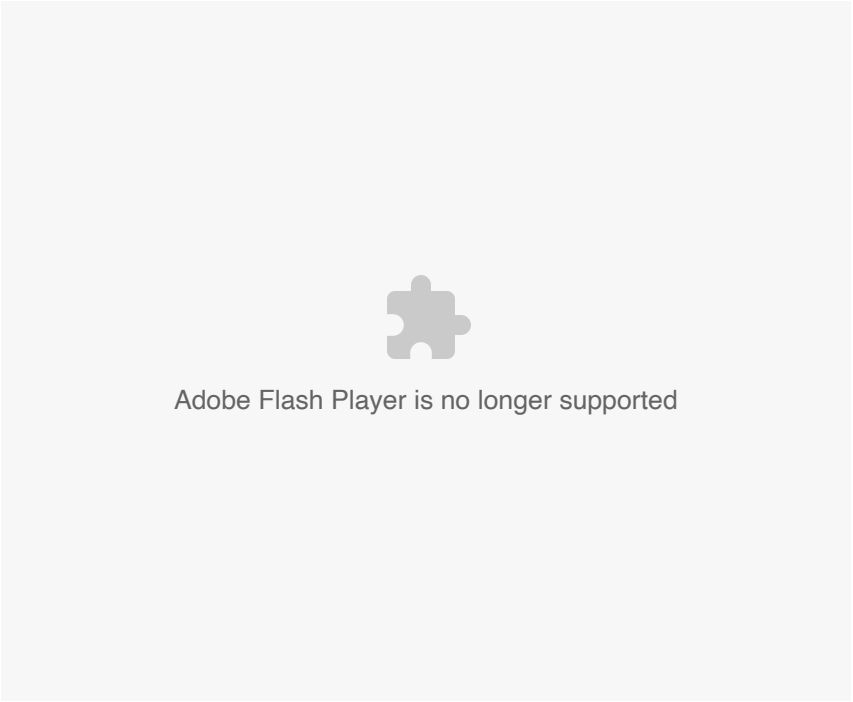
Adult Swim has become so synonymous with skeletal yet bubbly instrumental hip-hop that it's hard to listen to Flying Lotus, who's contributed three beats to Cartoon Network's lifestyle-savvy animation block, without immediately visualizing white bumper text on a black field. The Dntel-covering-Brian-Eno thing Adult Swim favors invariably produces pleasant-enough results, but on the vaguely Caribbean "Pet Monster Shotglass", the Lotus is going for something more than wallpaper. The L.A.-based producer comes off like Eliot Lipp mashing on Dabrye: Concerned with color saturation and spatial relationships, he dives headlong into hiccupping Miami bass; steel drum-ish runnels and woodblock-ish knocks; spindly percussion that claps and clicks and spits; hissing sparks and watery gulps that fast-forward and rewind in concise Möbius-montages; sinuous threads of buzzing and squelching synths; reggae's glassy lilt and acid house's soupy squiggles. Low tones roll erratically over the otherwise freezer-bagged components of the mix, and a relentless quadruple-tap keeps the song on rails as it trundles from a bowlegged shimmy to a svelte nighttime glide.

Posted by Brian Howe in hip hop on Tue: 10-17-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Mahogany Mahogany
“Supervitesse”
[Darla; 2006]
★★★½
"Between the click of the light and the start of the dream," as the Arcade Fire eloquently put it, we've all experienced a peculiar state of feverish neural activity-- a multi-sensory onslaught of shape, color, texture, tone, and imagery that rapid-fires through the headspace just before sleep sets in. Forget dream pop, because it's this busy pre-dream realm-- known as hypnagogia-- that New York octet Mahogany probe and evoke on their much-delayed sophomore artifact *Connectivity!*.

Idea and image collisions adorn *Connectivity!*'s artwork and propel this, the disc's first single (and corresponding video, for that matter). Sure, producer Robin Guthrie threatens to take "Supervitesse" off to Never Never Land-- with Cocteau shimmer and a Tinkerbell female voice cooing words like "luminous" and "delicate" as pixie dust-- but that restless bassline and those skittish, programmed drumbeats anchor the vessel just outside Wendy's window.

The tune's most rapturous moments are borne of this elegant contrast, with a male vocal lead linking the two opposing tendencies (opening with the line "our world without gravitation," no less). It's not the album's strongest moment-- and conspicuously lacks the gorgeous cellos that elevate surrounding tracks-- but it'll likely excite most worshippers of Stereolab, Broadcast, and this act's other material. Apparently gear thieves ran off with the early version of *Connectivity!* last autumn (hence the delay), but they can damn well keep it, because the rest of us just got this exquisite slice of pop hypnagogia.



Stream: Mahogany: Supervitesse
Posted by Matthew Solarski in dream pop on Tue: 10-17-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Martin Buttrich
“Full Clip”
[2006]
★★★★½
I admit, the brilliant simplicity of Philip Sherburne's last column didn't light the corners of my mind until just now, at the end of a 17-hour loop of the song "Full Clip". That might sound ridiculous to you, listening to one song for 17 hours when you have 892 days of songs on your hard drive and I, you would rightly assume, probably have twice that because I'm a shill for the record industry.

But guess what? I don't even listen to the free music I get. I rip it to iTunes and hit "shuffle", just in case a publicist or one of the editors checks my last.fm account. You really think I know what the Hold Steady sound like? Meanwhile, it's marathon sessions of Finnish modulator dervishes or Bazombo trance most days, which means it's fairly difficult for a track to crack my top 10 because I've only listened to 10 songs this year, and they're all fucking awesome.

Still that Sherburne's got an ear, so here we are. "Full Clip" is one of those minimal techno/house songs by an associate of Timo Maas. It references Carl Cox and DJ Rolando and other techno/house that neither you nor I have heard until we downloaded them five minutes ago, but that doesn't really matter. It's a speedtrain through a future megalopolis; it's foreplay with a cocaine mermaid that never climaxes; it's a rocket up an angel's ass; it's 10-plus minutes (if you can't handle more) of painstakingly constructed percussive and synthetic patterns repeated in different shades of incandescence to mimic the randomness of the human mind. What? It's a great song that transcends its ambiguous genre tag and makes you dance like an idiot for as long as you can stand it.

Stream: Martin Buttrich: Full Clip
Posted by Peter Macia in dance on Mon: 10-16-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Art Brut
“Nag Nag Nag Nag”
[2006]
★★★★½
I feel like I'm 15 again, again. On last year's *Bang Bang Rock & Roll*, Art Brut revived unresolved adolescent crushes ("Emily Kane"), adolescent sexual anxieties ("Rusted Guns of Milan"), and the embarrassingly fervent

teenage fanboy in an inordinate number of professionally crusty rock critics-- the kind of dorky, unguarded enthusiasm I'm still surprised to keep finding other people share. So of course the London quintet's newest single sets just such adolescent pop-music obsession to chunky rant-rock, with declarative guitar leads and crisp backing harmonies. Maybe they've become a little more rock'n'roll, but the real "Nag Nag Nag Nag" novelty is our chance to get extra familiar with the big brother of "My Little Brother". He's a guy who'd "rather be damp than seen in jeans," who memorizes lyrics from CD liners in vain efforts to impress, who can't help but resent his peers-- "How many girls have they seen naked?"-- and who distills his record collection to a mixtape to soundtrack his escape from his (presumably nagging) parents. Looking back, he knows he's too old to keep acting this way, 'cause duh, but here we all are, aren't we? If anyone needs me, I'll be in my room listening to Smiths B-sides.

Stream: Art Brut: Nag Nag Nag Nag
Posted by Marc Hogan in rock on Mon: 10-16-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jedi Mind Tricks
"Razorblade Salvation"
[Babygrande; 2006]
★★

While foam gathers on your lips as you contemplate the hip-hop fusion of Sufjan Stevens and Jedi Mind Tricks, consider that JMT's rep is built on homophobic and anti-Christian taunts. There's "I'm the one who hammered the first nail in Jesus" (from "Blood In Blood Out"), and "You like the smell of males on your mattress" (from "Nada Cambia"), just off the top of Google.

Yet somehow JMT still cleared a sample from Stevens's "Dumb I Sound" and snagged Illinoismaker and Asthmatic Kitty artist Shara Worden (My Brightest Diamond) to record the hook. Producer Stoupe speeds up "Dumb I Sound's" Hallmark-card melody, and its gentle arpeggios match his ascetic beat. Vinnie Paz, JMT's other half, raps about the consequences of suicide, how it would affect his family, what it would do to his girlfriend, etc. Worden's voice is stronger-- it has the mix of tenderness and strength that Paz reaches for lyrically, without success. She responds to Paz's verses: "You keep messing around with darkness/ You're the one who's losing." She's right; he lost. It's as if this epistolary song really wants to be indie's Eminem's "Stan", but without a convincing Stan, let alone an Elton-convincing Eminem.

Stream: Jedi Mind Tricks: Razorblade Salvation
Posted by Jessica Suarez in hip hop on Mon: 10-16-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Sugarland
"Want to"
[Mercury Nashville; 2006]
★★★★

The set-up for Sugarland's new single is a big night for a young couple: "I packed a cooler and a change of clothes/ You've got my heart and your daddy's boat." You know where it's heading (the song, and the boat), and you're right. But with her strong voice and intuitive phrasing, Sugarland singer Jennifer Nettles-- obviously not suffering the loss of singer/songwriter Kristen Hall from the group's fold-- makes the attraction between girl and boy very palpable and the conflict between mature self-denial and romantic abandon very real. The song's power is in her delivery, in moments like the slight hesitation when Nettles sings, "We got all night to make it...float." And she tears into the exclamatory chorus like she's ripping off a shirt (hers or his, doesn't matter), toying delicately with the meaning of "I don't want to if you don't want to": It's an ultimatum, and an invitation.

Stream: Sugarland: Want To
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Mon: 10-16-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Subtle
"The Mercury Craze"

[2006]
★★★★

Over Subtle's first two LPs, Doseone has taken the linear story of his protagonist, Hour Hero Yes-- an aspiring white rapper from California-- and ripped the pages apart only to paste the pieces together in non-sequential order. So unless you dig, you'll miss one of the most fascinating pieces of the Subtle puzzle.

But this, f*or hero: for fool*'s first single, lets listeners in through the front door: Dose namedrops Hour Hero in line two and spends the next four minutes building plotlines, all while being more subservient to song structure than ever before. He sets hooks, shifts rhythms, and stacks vocals above an electro-clash bottom bridged by sequencers, synthesizers, and sirens. Still, it's unadulterated multi-textual, multi-textural Subtle. The beat paints the story, attacking trend peddlers who, elsewhere, Dose labels as "serving up a hard bucket of most happening blood." That blood is the central metaphor, marking Hour Hero Yes as a normal guy turned into today's commodity by capitalists with questionable intentions. "What would give/ In order to get/ Your hands/ On the latest most luxurious blood?" Nothing: It's all here.

Posted by Grayson Currin in hip hop on Fri: 10-13-06: 07:05 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ying Yang Twins
“Dangerous [ft. Wyclef Jean]”
[2006]
★½

They still reside in an outlandish champagne room next door to R. Kelly's V.I.P. fantasies, but these horny nutballs will probably never be able to whisper as loudly again. They sure will try though. Hard. Here, they overstretch in search of more gimmicky raunch, saturating their weirdness instead of sublimating it. So you get irrepressible cockroach Wyclef doing his "Pee Wee Herman being strangled by a boa constrictor" thing and warbling lines like "she shake her ass like an avalanche," which doesn't even make sense. Throw in some Lil Jon-style preset distortion crunk-rock and that promiscuous "Maneater" hook. And don't forget to rap like Cookie Monster's pretzel-munching grandpa for a few bars too. There is some maturity (?) in the basic premise, though; they're not as sinisterly intent on "beating" and "pulling" as they are paranoid about falling for an intoxicating Beelzebooty (sorry) that can "take a thug, put them in a trance." So when the abrupt 20 second "Black Betty" outro crashes in, it actually makes sense within the world of the song. Too bad that world is a horrendous spitball mashup Betty herself wouldn't dare step in.

Stream: Ying Yang Twins: Dangerous [ft. Wyclef Jean]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Fri: 10-13-06: 07:05 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Dan Bryk
“We Don't Care”
B-Side: Dan Bryk
“BecaRebecca”
[Pop Up; 2006]
A-Side: ★★★★
B-Side: ★★★½

Dan Bryk's hyper-specific songs are as funny as they are poignant, approaching romantic strife with sarcasm and apathy. On the sparkling settling-for-less anthem "We Don't Care", Bryk can't even get worked up enough about his cheating lover to deploy his secret-weapon falsetto. He gets cleverly bilious with jabs like "you can trust me as far as I can thrust in you," but the titular refrain reminds us that it's not a big deal-- he's just saying. The careering garage-pop of "BecaRebecca" has an equally skewed relationship to the typical love song: A woman Bryk becomes infatuated with on an airplane is "rubenesque" and "statuesque" with "blue eyes framed by cat's eye glasses." But she also has "the faintest trace of a pencil thin mustache," a knock-off Gucci purse, and people call her "Chewbecca", although Bryk "would never do that." It's funny that singers who cynically exploit

idealized notions of plastic beauty and weighty fate scan as earnest and sensitive, while cynical Bryk's representations of the actual world, where physically flawed, terminally bored people half-heartedly find and lose each other all the time, contain so much more truth and empathy.

Stream: Dan Bryk: We Don't Care
Posted by Brian Howe in singer songwriter on Fri: 10-13-06: 07:05 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Audio Werner
"Just Wanna Get Down (Audio Werner Remix)"
[2006]
★★★★

Trapez and its Trapez Ltd. offshoot are part of the Traum Schallplatten label family overseen by ex-Kompakter Triple R. They may be Cologne labels, geographically speaking-- their headquarters, in fact, are directly across the street from Kompakt's-- but these days their sound leans a lot more towards Berlin. What's the difference? Not to overstate the case, but where Cologne leans more towards foursquare stomp (or shoomp) and the brassy, balls-out melodics of pop and/or trance, Berlin techno tends to be swingier and squirmier, like a polyamorous squirrel cheating a slow raccoon out of her prized marbles.

For his part, Audio Werner hails from Cologne too, though you'd never know it from his hyperkinetic nailbiters for Perlon and his own Hartchef label. His specialty is arranging all manner of tiny sounds into heaving, ridiculously funky jams that play out like an atomic reaction in a snowglobe. "Just Wanna Get Down (Audio Werner Remix)", his rework of a track he released on Trapez Ltd. late last year, offers a Pachinko parlor's worth of clatter-- hi-hats, plucked synths, guiros-- but it's so daintily, elegantly arranged that the players might as well be wearing white gloves and pearls. Think of all the metaphors that you can to describe tiny, gurgly little sounds: babbling brooks, chirping birds, beaded curtains, turn signals, hail. Now imagine all that detail thrown together and processed through a sieve, then viewed the wrong way through a telescope. Only one pressing question remains: how, then, did he make it so freakin' huge?

Audio Werner [MySpace]: http://www.myspace.com/72067018
Posted by Philip Sherburne in techno on Thu: 10-12-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

9th Wonder
"Brooklyn In My Mind (Crooklyn Dodgers Part 3) [ft. Mos Def, Jean Grae, and Memphis Bleek]"
[2006]
★★

I've only spent a combined 24 hours in Brooklyn, but this song has me feeling very emotional about the borough. Unfortunately, that emotion is pity. Between Jay-Z's return wearing the Wizards' 2-3 and this misguided homage co-starring his Def Janitor, Memphis Bleek, BK is not looking all that regal to those of us outside its borders.

Thing is, this song could have come and gone harmlessly without 9th Wonder's parentheses. It could have just been his view from Durham. But there it is: "(Crooklyn Dodgers Part 3)". From 9th Wonder's featherdusting of both Q-Tip's and Premier's originals to Mos and Memph's swaggerish real-isms, there is nothing to suggest the frustrated melancholy or defensive loyalty of either "Crooklyn Dodgers" or their "Return". Only Grae bothers to speak explicitly of her adopted borough-- her verse is a lovingly scripted tribute to Brooklyn as Big Sis-- but her voice is swallowed by the production's grandiose Kanye-like string sample. If nothing else, "Brooklyn In My Mind" is the perfect metaphor for the failures of latter-day New York City hip-hop, failures resulting from empty nostalgia, risk-averse production, and a sense of entitlement to dominance that always ends up sounding like delusions of grandeur.
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Thu: 10-12-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fic
"Rep Minnesota"
[2006]
★★★★

To outsiders, Minnesota rap basically means the heart-on-sleeve emo-rap camp of Atmosphere's Rhymesayers. But the Land of the Lakes' Fic aka Fiction takes this triumphant production-- built on StreetPrez's dramatic strings and a bargain basement drum loop-- and immediately makes it more Minny-centric than anything since Garnett and Marbury were giggling together on the T-Wolves' bench nigh a decade ago. Fic doesn't push bombast the way a lot of unknown MCs might; he just pushes what he knows. Take: "What you know about ice--cold weather?!" Solid punchlines, no affectation, no gimmickry either. In fact, I'm fairly certain he's asking us what we know about cold weather. Fic's gruff delivery doesn't quite match the grandeur of the track, but his civic pride is duly noted. Even if you don't believe the screwed hook that gurgles "I rep Minnesota" over and over, consider this angrily delivered credo from Fic: "Even on my day off I eat, piss, shit and slept Minnesota." The grammar is all off, but we get the message.

Stream: Fic: Rep Minnesota
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Thu: 10-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

UNK
“Walk It Out”
[2006]
★★½

In the ever-growing canon of 06 rap dances, the Walk It Out is perhaps the least high-minded. It's an exaggerated, swiveling knee jerk at both legs coupled with flailing arms (in whatever manner one pleases), moving from left to right and back again. Walking but going nowhere, is the essence. Conceptually, this sounds incredibly lazy, but at full-speed, it's exhilarating, an updated pop-and-lock. UNK, or DJ UNK as he's known in Atlanta, has concocted this, yet another sweaty, skittering song almost entirely about dancing. There's so little going on, from DJ Montay's vacillating high-end keyboards to UNK's grade-school bullshit ("It's on once again, Patron once again") that without an accompanying dance, this song is less than a blip. Creating music strictly to start a foxtrot frenzy is old as the day is long; but as hip-hop extends itself from Chicken Noodle Soup to the Toe Wop and hopefully back, at some point, to the Harlem Shake, we're stuck walking, not running, through the motions.

Video: UNK: Walk It Out
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Thu: 10-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Good, the Bad and the Queen
“Herculean”
[2006]
★★★
I can see how this happened: Damon Albarn driving across England in a white van, thieving Simon Tong, Paul Simonon (ex-Clash bassist), and Tony Allen (ex-Fela Kuti drummer) out their beds, ducttaping and blindfolding each one till he's done explaining his master plan. Yet for all the omg! surrounding this British pop chimera, it plopped onto the internet like a hunk of molasses-- a surprisingly heady, sedated number considering Albarn's recent "Feel Good" hits. If you're going to recruit a dream team, you should probably use all the players. This wispy electronic backing says otherwise, allowing little showmanship for the rhythm section. Also, I'm sure the other band members probably shot Albarn a look when he doused his vocals with the same intercom effect that's all over the last Gorillaz LP, but here it complements the melody well; at this point it might even be Albarn's actual singing voice. With their powers combined they're not exactly Captain Planet (only Albarn is), but on paper this lineup's just too good to fuck up such an easy alley-oop.
Posted by Adam Moerder in rock on Wed: 10-11-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Red Cafe
“Diddy Bop”
[2006]
★★

This Brooklyn MC is another sad example of New York City's wallowing second-class status in contemporary rap culture. His rumored major label debut has been in and out of Capitol, Def Jam, Universal-- at this point, best bet has it never seeing Virgin shelves. So how does he hope to break out of the flooded malaria water known as NYC's current mixtape malaise? Simple: Not dance. "I diddy bop 'cause I got bad feet," he explains. To dance is to give in to the Atlanta denizens snapping their lives away; to practically move at all is to admit defeat. Two years ago, Fat Joe proposed his own solution to the classic club banger/lack of coordination dilemma. But Red isn't about to even dip his shoulder. "I can't lean back," he says. It's not that he *doesn't want* to lean back, he actually *can't*. Can't let go of the muscle-shirt toughness for even a second. Can't stray from the second-rate Swizzle horns and whistles. Can't give New York a reason to care. Because, let's face it, if you can't lean back, what can you do?

Stream: Red Cafe: Diddy Bop

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Wed: 10-11-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Modernist
"Pearly Spencer"
[2006]
★★★★

Those of us with short attention spans never had too much use for Kompakt's stable of elegantly swirling tick-tock throb architects, but something about the layered-up synth-twinkles on "Pearly Spencer" absolutely stabs me in the chest. To my ears most of the slabs those Germans churn out ride one trick per track: a pretty New Order synth arpeggio, or a ghostly string-section swoop, or a little electro-handclap snap, or a vocoderized purr. Those things are all great, but they aren't enough to keep me interested for six minutes. So "Pearly Spencer" works by quantity; it layers up all those little tricks, slowly and luxuriously building all of them until we're hearing something fast and busy enough to keep us from watching the bear falling out of the tree on YouTube again.

Posted by Tom Breihan in electronic on Wed: 10-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

...And You Will Know Us by the Trail Of Dead
"The Goldheart Mountaintop Queen Directory"
[2006]
★★★

And I suppose *your* band would cover it by playing a broken acoustic through a belt-clip amplifier while someone blew a jug onstage and it would all be really, really poignant. There's no other way to remake Guided By Voices' "Goldheart Mountaintop Queen Directory" but earnestly. I'm stunned that anyone thought the original was anything but. Enter Trail of Dead, they of the unwieldy name and the most outsized ambitions of any indie-rock band to throw down the strings and the piano and the multi-layered harmonies and the mega-schmaltz. Sacrilege, I hear your cry, but this is perfect on paper at least: paying tribute to lo-fi mystique by making it as grandiose as possible. I take issue with Trail of Dead's emetic taste in production, and those farty-sounding keyboards in the beginning belong in the background of PBS children's programming. But those are minor gripes. The cover succeeds not because the band avoids embarrassing themselves, but because they embarrass themselves to a perfect, completely relatable degree.

Posted by Jason Crock in rock on Wed: 10-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jack Ingram
"Love You"
[2006]
★★½

First listen, first verse: This guy so wants to cuss but the strictures of country radio prevent anything stronger than a "dang" or a "mother-lovin'". First listen, second verse: Aha, that's the point! Ingram substitutes innocuous words like "love" for "fuck" and "shoot" for "shit", like Robert Earl Keen in "That Buckin' Song". So "Love You" is a clever send-up of uptight country-music morals, and it has the effect of hearing your grandma drop the f-bomb. However, second and subsequent listens: The novelty wears off considerably, and all that's left is that rinkydink rockytonk guitar riff and a timid rebelliousness. There's a part of everyone that wants to let loose a

string of expletives at a cheating lover or a stalled truck, but the song is still wrapped up in its fuddy-duddy shell, afraid to venture beyond its puns and own up to these impulses. Fuck that.

Stream: Jack Ingram: Love You
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Wed: 10-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

M.I.A.
"XR 2"
[2006]
★★★½
I won't even try to get into the origin of this song or what it might mean for the future of the internet. All I know is former DFA Records guy, James Stair, posted it to his blog from Diplo's MySpace, and the title refers not to some imperialist-slaying fashion missile but a shitty British tuner car-- a Ford Fiesta, specifically. You figure out what that means to you.

The song itself might seem obvious to those who stalk Hollertrons: It's got the spastic staccato airhorns of Rio baile funk and the B-more breaks which Diplo's been importing for a few years now. More of the same globalist genre-blending maybe, but, in comparison to *Arular*, it's pretty brutal and by far the most legitimately jacking M.I.A. track since Diplo twerked "Uraqt" for her on *Piracy Funds Terrorism*. Think Kelis' "Blindfold Me" pitched to a speed that is just beyond your level of dancefloor comfort. Add to that M.I.A.'s new voice-- a jaded monotone that mumbles non-sequiturs like "Where were you in '92?" and "MTV not ADD"-- and the haters finally get what they wanted: A real club banger without all that terrorist banshee wailing.
MP3: M.I.A.: XR 2
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Tue: 10-10-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Miss Derringer
"He Hung on a Sunday"
[2006]
★★★★
L.A.-based Miss Derringer are itching for a knife-fight with Dresden Dolls and the Raveonettes, and damned if it doesn't sound like the band could take their turf. An sculptor by day, Liz McGrath comes on like a new wave Weimar cowgirl, swirling a martini of cabaret, pop, rockabilly, and country with her manicured pinkie. The band sorts styles just as easily: On "He Hung on a Sunday" Morgan Slade's guitar quotes Santo & Johnny's "Sleepwalkin'" in the opening notes, then heads into a waltz-time solo that sounds like a greaser juvenile delinquent on a surfboard. With little sign that they're playing dress-up, Miss Derringer casually inhabit the song and its implied historical setting (which is fortunately more *Deadwood* than *Mississippi Burning*). And McGrath nails the theatrical emotions on the big push, hinting at a sordid saga behind the song and making it sound three-dimensional.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Tue: 10-10-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Monica
"Sideline Ho"
[2006]
★★★★½
I think somewhere along the line I wrote Monica off: quivering voice not strong enough, subject matter too bland, Brandy duet too cloying, nothing sounds like "Don't Take It Personal (Just One of Dem Days)" anymore, and so on. Now, in light of her wondrously crushing new album, I can cross off another songwriter I dismissed long ago only to rediscover as endlessly rewarding. There aren't too many songs that will debut this year whose first word is "Ho." It's as jarring as any sick fuck misogy-rap record ever could be. And while her opening salvo may not look like much on paper, it's a gripping at-attention moment. Delivered directly to her boyfriend's girl on the side, "Sideline Ho" is also a perfectly enunciated addition to the R&B lexicon. "Did you meet his Moms,

have you met his kids?/ Did you know my kid was his?" she asks said floozy with steely resolve, understanding and empathetic, but indignant enough to slap a bitch. Somehow Monica is attempting to inspire ("If you don't got benefits, house keys, credit cards, then you's a sideline ho") and denigrate at once. I guess I'm checking for Monica again.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in r&b on Tue: 10-10-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Horse Feathers
“Hardwood Pews”
[2006]
★★★½

The music writer's beloved "If ____ were ____" game is a slippery slope that can end in painful abstractions. "If Horse Feathers were two long, thin blades terminating in ring-shaped handles and joined by a swivel pin, they'd be a pair of scissors." But these musical madlibs can be useful if kept in check, and there are worse points of entry to Horse Feathers than imagining if Tracy Chapman were in Iron and Wine. A homely relic in sepia tones and rough grains, "Hardwood Pews" tools along on a dreamy twang, prayerful and serene, ultimately sweeping upwards in a gust of strings and singing saw. Never mind that Justin Ringle's a man with the beard to prove it; his winsome croak is humble and sexless, and his imagery-- hardwood pews, lovely ladies, bodies and babies and graves-- is dredged up from the murky depths of the same Southern Gothic swimming hole in which Beam has paddled so many slow, patient laps.

MP3: Horse Feathers: Hardwood Pews
Posted by Brian Howe in folk on Tue: 10-10-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Be Good Tanyas
“When Doves Cry”
[2006]
★★★

Like so many of his songs, "When Doves Cry" seems so inseparable from Prince's performance-- the rhythms and melodies fitted to his delivery, the lyrics specific to the autobiographical fiction of *Purple Rain*-- that anyone covering it is going to sound a bit awkward. Now the British Columbia-based Be Good Tanyas put their spin on it, translating Prince's psychosexual self-reckoning to an alt-honkytonk setting. Played as an acoustic skiffle on guitar and drums, the main rhythm has lost its sleazy crawl.

Frazey Ford's tense interpretation sounds more outwardly declarative than inwardly reckoning. That she's made the point of view specifically female is quite a bold decision too. With its invitation to "touch if you will my stomach" and its calm romantic recrimination ("How could you just leave me standing alone in a world that's so cold?"), could "When Doves Cry" disguise a ballad of unwanted pregnancy? Does the narrator doubt her own qualifications as a parent, lamenting the traits she's inherited and fearing she'll pass along? Prince never had that in mind, and it's unclear whether the Be Good Tanyas actually intend this reading, but the mere suggestion makes this cover more compelling than most.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in folk on Tue: 10-10-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jay-Z
“Show Me What You Got”
[2006]
★★★

For all its redundancies, the thing still defibrillates. Once it really starts to whip (:18), giddiness is all but involuntary; you lean front, swing left, turn the knob right, bring it back. Working well within the terra-blasting stylistic groove he's bombed out for himself, Just Blaze displays his most riveting blend of live instrumentation and savvy sampling yet. Filling every space with ear-pop, dime-stop frills from both drum kit and organ, he

makes chops work for hip-hop-- something the Roots are still working on. In a year when rap's finest producers are bringing their best to r&b, it's a relief to hear one of the year's most anticipated hip-hop tracks launched with such verve.

Then there's, uh, Jay. The stubborn Hov-apologist side of my brain wants to inflame lame excuses. It's better than "Change Clothes"! It's not easy to flow over this shit! Did you hear him internalize the rhythm on that five-armed snare-bust fill! The woman he's sidling up to is actually a personification of today's hapless rap landscape! Check for that Curtis Jackson/Tip Harris subliminal! Still got that swagger! et al. But, really, we've been waiting two years for this. There's no excuse. "No two alike like a snowflake," he says, obviously not referring to his own lyrical output. With few B.I.G. lines left to plunder, Jay recklessly reverts to his own past. Seasonal updates. Gold bottles. "The king's back!" And, of course, the Jordan obsession, which is getting creepier (and lazier) by the verse.

The song's titular message is supposed to incite his competition to step it up. But, considering all the garbage he's co-signed as president, such bitching becomes a nasty boomerang. Maybe he's sabotaging Def Jam by day so his eventual "resurrections" will seem more meaningful. Or maybe he's just been listening to a lot of Rick Ross. "Get the fuck out the throne you clone," he says. Propped up by lyrical fluff, the threat is unconvincing.

- *XXL*'s Making Of: http://xxlmag.com/online/?p=5227
- **Stream: Jay-Z**: Show Me What You Got

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Mon: 10-09-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

White Magic
“The Light”
[2006]
★★★★½

Like an acoustic Electrelane, White Magic weave monkish mantras and spiraling instrumentation into weirdly amorphous yet direly catchy pop: This is some snake-charming, kaleidoscopic, aboriginal shit. "The Light" uses hidden hinges to amalgamate several distinct, melodically ingenious permutations of billowing vocals, terse pianos, rumbling drums and sinuous guitars in a seamless unfurling motion. The chunky bass-plink-plink piano phrase slyly accumulates squiggly digressions, while imbricate vocal harmonies doppler complexly through the fluctuating arrangement. They intone fallow vowels, chirp clipped consonants, helix around each other in dizzy oscillations, and resolve, out of a languid soup, into actual, emphatically moaned words with big rounded edges. The song in total describes a gentle pitch and yaw, like liquid sloshing in a bucket, reflecting back a cockeyed world symmetrically distorted by concentric ripples.

Posted by Brian Howe in indie on Mon: 10-09-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Twilight Sad
“And She Would Darken the Memory of Youth”
[2006]
★★★★

Ever since *The Joshua Tree*, way too many bands have tried matching the self-proclaiming transcendence that plenty of otherwise reasonable people find in U2 anthems. New Fat Cat signees the Twilight Sad do to every would-be "With or Without You" what Jimi Hendrix did to "The Star-Spangled Banner". Co-produced by German-born labelmate and "post-classical" composer Max Richter, the Glaswegian quartet's "And She Would Darken the Memory" obliterates its own romantic swoop in post-shoegaze explosions-- and *that's* fucking transcendent.

Others, notably the Walkmen, have taken a similarly destructive approach to unrelenting basslines and cascades of ringing guitars. But where those New Yorkers' "The Rat" was downtown sleazy, "And She Would Darken the Memory of Youth" is practically apocalyptic, its stoic drone convulsing in peals of red-line thunder near the closing seconds. "I'm putting up with your constant whine," James Graham sings, with poise and a thick burr. It's hard to tell who's the asshole here, but my vote's usually for any guy who calls himself Bono Vox.

Posted by Marc Hogan in indie rock on Mon: 10-09-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

My Latest Novel
“Sister Sneaker Sister Soul”
[Bella Union/The Worker's Institute; 2006]
★★★

Listen, you're gonna get over it, and then it'll all seem pretty silly. In the moment, though, unrequited love looms large. The debut single by Glasgow five-piece My Latest Novel-- whose album will be out via The Worker's Institute on Oct. 31-- explores overwrought emotional vastness like the sensitive acoustic types they are: with two-tone quiet/loud dynamics and lots of strings. Nope, they're not the Goo Goo Dolls. Singer Chris Deveney's restraint keeps six-minute "Sister Sneaker Sister Soul" closer to the anthemic vulnerability of fellow Glaswegians Snow Patrol or Arab Strap. He's not saying much new ("I only know her first name," Deveney sings over folkie arpeggios), but the campfire choir of ba-ba-bas behind him make the old story worth hearing again. Crashing guitars and billowy violins neatly simulate the hugeness of adolescent devotion. Hard to explain old crushes, but it's nice to feel the butterflies.

Posted by Marc Hogan in indie rock on Mon: 10-09-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Frightened Rabbit
“Set You Free”
[2006]
★★

In the 1990s, American alternative-rock bands and their UK soundalikes tended to repeat one particular chord progression, add their own angst-ridden lyrics, and call it a hit: Green Day's "When I Come Around", Better Than Ezra's "Good", Bush's "Glycerine", my high school pop-punk trio's "Erik Song". Two-piece Frightened Rabbit are from Glasgow, and they're not much for angst, but their take on N-Trance's "Set You Free" offers a twangy, earnest, rave-rooted variation on that former buzz-clip formula.

It's a love song, see: "Wanna hold you, baby," singer Scott begins as fractured guitars sound out their familiar theme, his brother Grant pitter-pattering on the drums. Thing about love, turns out, is "only love can set you free," or so the chorus reminds us. Like the chords, all the plain-spoken words fall just where they should in a song you'd have once heard on the radio, but something is plainly missing. While you wouldn't change the station when "Set You Free" came on, neither would you tape it for your friends.

Posted by Marc Hogan in indie rock on Mon: 10-09-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bodyrox
“Yeah Yeah (D. Ramirez Remix)”
[2006]
★★★½
In electro-house, as in any buzzing sub-genre, the distance between underground cache and overground cash-in is just a matter of timing. Two years ago, D. Ramirez’s remix of Bodyrox's "Yeah Yeah" would have seemed unbearably cool, its balefully metallic, harshly harmonizing riffs declaring fidelity with Tiefschwarz, DJ T, Steve Bug, Roman Flügel, and an assortment of other scrupulously robotic German obscurantists. If it was released next year, it would surely evoke images of preposterous haircuts and overly busy t-shirt designs, and we would all cringe at the gross cynicism of the entire exercise. In 2006, it’s the sound of electro-house’s ascendancy in mainstream club circles encapsulated into a single monolithic groove, the restlessly perky house percussion and the addictive simplicity of its ever-mutating hook somehow ubiquitous and inevitable, but not yet irritating. You’ll be tempted to deny it later, but at this very second its smugness is intoxicating; submit now before you think better of it.

Stream: Bodyrox: Yeah Yeah (D. Ramirez Remix)

Posted by Tim Finney in electro house on Fri: 10-06-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Kissogram
“My Friend Is a Seahorse (Radio Slave Remix)”
[2006]
★★★★

Radio Slave, one suspects, is something of a one-trick pony. But who cares, when the trick is as good as this. An apparent disciple of Carl Craig, Radio Slave's basic approach as a remixer is to grab a few choice elements of the original and sand them down like choicest redwood, or pull them like manna-flavored taffy, planing and stretching everything into great, yearning forms that angle towards the horizon and follow the curve of the world through Cancer, through Capricorn, and beyond. (Real name Matt Edwards, he also produces original material under both the Radio Slave and Rekid aliases, in addition to running the Rekids label, but so far his remixes trump his own output.)

This isn't his best rework; that would be his remix of Chelonis R. Jones' "Deer in the Headlights", followed closely by his paranoid, seasick rendition of the Knife's "We Share Our Mother's Health." But this scary/dreamy swirl of gravel and cotton-candy, underpinned by unfathomably deep bass and adorned with diamond-hard finger snaps, is nonetheless a damn fine example of his style. He cuts unbridled forward motion with just the right amount of restraint; you can never really tell when it's revving up or pulling back. Making do with half a dozen sounds and maybe three discrete notes, it manages to conjure an entire universe of drama whether or not you understand the weird female vox at the end. Is it German? Danish? Something made-up and run backwards? Only the seahorses would know for sure, but they're too busy running point at the bow of this vessel as it ferries from the rave to the land of the dead and back again, over and over again.

defDrive Records (MySpace): http://www.myspace.com/defdriverecords

Posted by Philip Sherburne in dance on Fri: 10-06-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Albert Hammond Jr.
"Everyone Gets a Star"
[2006]
★★★½

The problem with first impressions, especially *Of Earth*, is that Albert Hammond Jr. only got one, and he crammed it with ten times the cutesy guitar lines as the previous two Strokes albums combined. With this solo career on the side, Hammond finds the elbow room sorely lacking on the busy *First Impressions*, his ax sounding its most placid since the opening bars of "Is This It?" Whereas Casablancas' drunken megaphone howls contrasted Hammond's tight, focused riffs, here Junior's vocals sound like an extension of the guitar, light and smooth enough for the melody to glide like a maglev train. At times "Star" could be confused for a light-hearted Pinback or even a "smart" Sugar Ray, especially on the winner-take-all chorus. However, whether it's the tinny processed drum machine or the deadpan delivery of the sing-song hooks, Hammond's sanitized take on the Strokes' sound comes with enough winks and nudges to keep this saccharine bonbon from becoming an aborted sour patch kid.

Stream: Albert Hammond Jr.: Everyone Gets a Star

Posted by Adam Moerder in rock on Fri: 10-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ad Astra Per Aspera
"Voodoo Economics"
[2006]
★★★½

"Voodoo Economics" is more like voodoo evolution (kind of like a voodoo pregnancy, if you've seen *Seed of Chucky*), where Ad Astra Per Aspera start out dragging their knuckles but end up running backwards in a circle around the listener by minute four. An organ wheezes out the soundtrack to empty pews and collection plates over the kick drum of a one-man band, while someone idly strums their guitar by the pegs for a stilted, hellish sound. After a disco beat here and several other indie tropes there, you'll realize the guitars are completely copping Nick Zinner's moves, but it works, even if all this sounds disjointed on paper. Falsetto mewling turns to political screaming ("We're asking for subsistence"), but the lo-fi recording nulls the high ambition of the track while keeping it cohesive, with thin, trebly organs and guitars dominating the twists and turns of the rhythm section. The end result is vaguely danceable and sufficiently nasty, and it sounds good between pretty much anything. I declare a new mixtape killer.

MP3: Ad Astra Per Aspera: Voodoo Economics

Posted by Jason Crock in rock on Fri: 10-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Trace Adkins
“Swing”
[2006]
★★½
Trace Adkins opens his new single intoning "Take me out to the ballgame" like it's some shameless action-flick catchphrase. It's definitely a ridiculous moment, but the rest of this testosterone-soaked novelty hit has modest aims: It just wants to capture the mood of guys crowding the bar, razzing each other, ordering more rounds, staggering to the john, and strategizing how to get some honkytonk badonkadonk. Its wit and smarts are about equal to those of its buzzed characters. Sure, pick-up lines like "What's your sign?" and "Yeah, I went to Harvard" are supposed to be lame, but even as lame pick-up lines, these are especially lame, representing a deficit of imagination that makes "Swing" a base hit instead of a homer. Still, a lot of quarters will be slotted into a lot of jukeboxes for this song, which means it has automatically fulfilled its mission, even if it fails to translate outside of its singles-bar setting.

Stream: Trace Adkins: Swing

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Fri: 10-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Arthur Russell
“Springfield (DFA Remix)”
[2006]
★★★★½

There are so many ways a remix crew could approach a few hours of tapes containing sketches of an unreleased Arthur Russell track. The DFA took the high road, tabling their distinctive sound to listen close and hard and figure out the best way to let Russell be Russell. This is as respectful as a remix gets, which isn't always a good thing, but here it feels right. If someone found the lost *Magnificent Ambersons* prints in Brazil, the smart editor would ring immediately for Orson Welles' notes. And "Springfield" does feel like a peak for Russell, his production moving away from disco and toward the syncopated electronic soul of the late 80s and early 90s. Beats remind me of Kraftwerk's contemporaneous techno pop proper, but the wires are grounded with his cello's catgut as bits of trumpet and a dreamy synth release a ray of relaxed salsa sunshine.

The DFA's masterstroke, though, was removing clutter to let Russell's voice dominate when it emerges. He could sound tentative, sometimes, like he wasn't sure he should be singing, which was always charming anyway. But here he sounds strong and clear and the melody is lovely. He's not around long enough, but that's not the DFA's fault. It's like he'd finally found the thing, the voice, right there toward the end.

Posted by Mark Richardson in disco on Thu: 10-05-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Ivy League
“London Bridges”
[2006]
★★★★

The Swedes have established such a dominant bear-hug on this sort of romantic indie pop that it's hard to believe Alex Suarez and Ryland Blackinton aren't Swedish, or British (despite their obvious Anglophilia), or even Belle & Sebastian; "London Bridges" cops the slightly breathless lilt of songs like "Me and the Major" or "Seeing Other People" pretty unabashedly. On the title track of their new EP, the Brooklyn-based duo fit neatly between recent cozy-pop faves the Whitest Boy Alive and Peter, Bjorn & John, working the same seam of homely beauty and prematurely autumnal sentimentality. Gleams of electric guitar fly off of a glassy acoustic shuffle like droplets off an oily pelt; the singer with the stronger voice doles out misty-eyed nostalgia while the thinner-voiced one murmurs small encouragements at the foot of each line. Somewhere, a Soulseeking Fergie fan is confused as hell.

Stream: The Ivy League: London Bridges

Posted by Brian Howe in indie pop on Thu: 10-05-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Beck
“Dark Star (Remix by David Andrew Sitek)”
[2006]
★★★
As mentioned in our recent interview with him, TV on the Radio's David Sitek went kinda "free jazz" on this one. Only the jazz here isn't so much free as it is less smooth. Where Beck's original is a spotless, buttoned-up groove, with his deadpan rapping in the verses barely surfacing above the bassline, Sitek's remix is fussy and ragged, leaving Beck slightly more exposed. Producer Nigel Godrich's muted drums are replaced by sleigh bells and a digital thud; swooning strings are translated into droning woodwinds; a sqeaky clean harmonica solo becomes a darting flute tirade. The results make Beck sound less like a jaded boho prophet, more an undead crazy hobo. This is a good thing.

"Dark Star" doesn't leave Sitek too much to work with, but the best part of the song, The Word of Beck, remains, so if you're happy there, you'll be happy here. The irony being that the only way to legally obtain "For the People" Sitek's remix of Beck's dropout anthem is on downloado-fascist iTunes, but I'm sure you'll buck the system.

Stream: Beck: Dark Star (Remix by TV on the Radio) [from the Information LP]
Posted by Peter Macia in rock on Thu: 10-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Rope
“She the Assassin”
[2006]
★★★½
To dig the dark, dramatic sound of avant-rock trio Rope, you have to buy into the idea that music this histrionic can also be sneakily subtle. Guitarist Przemyslaw Krzysztof Drazek and bassist/vocalist Robert Iwanik (who formed Rope in Poland in 1998, then moved to Chicago in 2000) make a pretty convincing case. "She the Assasin" opens the band's second album with all kinds of theatrics: show-stopping riffs, arty noises, slanted sax, steep climaxes that slam to abrupt halts. Yet weird timing and Iwanik's Tom Waits-like whispers tie all the bombastic jolts and pregnant pauses into a compelling knot, much like the way U.S. Maple's chopped chords and choked growls create their own odd logic.

: http://myspace.com/roperope
Posted by Marc Masters in rock on Thu: 10-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lil' Chris
“Checkin' It Out”
[2006]
★★★
Lil' Chris, the lead singer in the "School of Rock"-esque UK reality series "Rock School" (season 2), releases his first single, a rambunctious little power-pop number that provides a spotlight for his hysterical power-bleat. You kind of want to punch him in the face, but it's an asset-- you just want to want to. He's silly and eager to please (born entertainer) but it's clear he can still bait an audience, too (born rock star). He's got more bite than the song, except for a streak of gee-whiz budding misogyny ("I seek my golden opportunity/ To take a cherry from her apple tree") that's undercut a little by Chris' goofy warbles and tics, and the fact that he's astutely dumb about the whole thing. That's probably the sort of lesson Gene Simmons teaches you in Rock School.

Stream: Lil' Chris: Checkin' It Out
Posted by David Moore in pop on Thu: 10-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tussle
“Second Guessing”
[2006]
★★★★

Firstly, "Second Guessing" would be nothing without the bassline-- a taut, melodic little guy that's hardly flashy (five notes, maybe) but is instantly memorable. Tempo doesn't hurt, either, this track being far more insistent than

a lot of Tussle's last dub-sleepy LP. But there's a mastery of tension here, in that they keep setting us up for an actual verse-chorus-verse song and stop just shy of delivering. The drums drop out, then burst forth like it's time for a big hook, but all you get is a ringing off-note and a whoosh of echo, or maybe a bell or two in the background. You can wait on the edge of your seat for the release or you can get up and dance, but either way, "Second Guessing" ends before you know it, and ends up the best kind of scam: You won't even know you're a mark until you check your wrist for the time and your watch is gone.

Stream: Tussle: Second Guessing
Posted by Jason Crock in dub on Wed: 10-04-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dino Felipe
"Frayola"
[2006]
★★★
Dino Felipe is a Miami-based electronic noisemaker with reams of releases on Soft Abuse, Sublight, Schematic, and others. The best of his bulging catalogue is probably two collaborative CDs with Schematic label-mate Nick Forte that drip with colorful, Fennesz-tinted fuzz. But he's also capable of aggressive noise, languid ambience, psycho sampling, and weirdo pop. On "Frayola" he grabs an old Digital Hardcore hat from the back of his disheveled closet. Slipping laser blips and videogame belches under distorted male-female rants, Felipe initially evokes Atari Teenage Riot and their comrades, but ultimately comes closer to the dilated cacophony of Royal Trux circa *Twin Infinitives*. "Frayola"'s snotty drool may be a passing pleasure, but this kind of strung-out gunk isn't easy to come by lately, and as another stylistic notch on Felipe's widening belt, it's kinda perfect.
Stream: Dino Felipe: Frayola
Posted by Marc Masters in noise on Wed: 10-04-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Swan Lake
"Are You Swimming In Her Pools?"
[2006]
★★★★½

If Swan Lake's three men share three traits, they are: obliqueness, dramatic flair, and existential angst. Here Spencer Krug, who helped craft both Wolf Parade's thumping, wailing pow-wows and the raucous expressionism of Sunset Rubdown, takes the lead both as writer and singer. Yet it sounds like he's aping another Swan Laker, Destroyer's Dan Bejar. But rather than whistling glam-rock mythologies through his nose, however, Krug charts a quiet tour of romantic metaphors and resignation. The song has a fatalistic arc, building and building, from hushed folk minimalism to an autumnal, keening kitchen-sink catharsis: all rustling wind chimes and whistling synths and sputtering guitars. That these elements don't crash together in an artsy over-calculated Sturm und Drang of "literate" self-reference is a feat in itself. Instead they co-exist peacefully, half storybook village, half rustbelt hamlet.

Posted by Roque Strew in indie rock on Wed: 10-04-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Shut Up Stella
"Country Lemonade"
[2006]
★★★
Shut Up Stella, a new girl-group managed by Kay Hanley (Letters to Cleo; Josie and the Pussycats), has "legit" written all over it. Jessie Eden, Gwen Stefani sound-alike Kristen Wagner, and rapper Fan_3 write their own songs, are opposed to Paris and Lindsay, and (you know) are bringing some edge to the music that preceded them. It's like "post-teenpop" or something, a corrective to the genre's current development since a perceived Golden Age. The Spice Girls are an acknowledged influence, and in this song's chorus, Shut Up Stella evoke circa-2000 teenpoppers like B*Witched and Triple Image. The rest is a goofy banjo-rap cartoon of the South, although they're less brutal than, say, Daphne and Celeste in "Never Been to Memphis" ("step to the left/ jump to

the right/ now jump off a cliff/ that'd be a beautiful sight"). SUS need the "country lemonade", plus they namedrop Big and Rich and get high with the Dixie Chicks. Might make a few enemies that way, too.

Stream: Shut Up Stella: Country Lemonade

Posted by David Moore in pop on Wed: 10-04-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Wreckers
“Leave the Pieces”
[2006]
★★★½

Country music seems to be looking for a way to fill its Dixie Chicks-size hole, and SheDaisy ain't cutting it. So enter (again) the Wreckers, whose "Leave the Pieces" is a recent #1 country single. Michelle Branch and Jessica Harp have more in common with Jewel than with Faith or Shania, which might be proof that radio will take those chirpy harmonies and female-empowerment lyrics from anywhere but the actual Dixie Chicks. Let's not get bogged down with questions of authenticity though, at least for now. "Leave the Pieces" is a fine slice of country-pop with an interesting twist: It's sung from the perspective of a woman who must persuade a weak-willed guy to get on with it and break her heart. Branch and Harp sing with such easy harmony and confident phrasing that you never question their strong-willed determination for heartbreak. Still, you'll wonder why they just don't dump the chump themselves.

Stream: The Wreckers: Leave the Pieces

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Wed: 10-04-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Axolotl
“Pneuma”
[2006]
★★★½

The more stuff that the prolific Karl Bauer (now the sole member of Bay Area outfit Axolotl) puts out, the higher his hypnotic drones seem to rise. “Pneuma,” the first cut on his new *Way Blank* LP, may be the most ascendant thing Bauer has done, a lushly dissonant wash that continually climbs upwards like stairs in an M.C. Escher painting. Bauer’s layers of violin and the windy echo that trails behind both grow like time-lapse grass, gathering up stubbly noise and hymn-like chants along the way. The remainder of *Way Blank* is even denser, seven mini-masterpieces of colorful textures and thick atmospheres. But I actually haven’t heard the rest very often-- the temptation to skip back to “Pneuma”’s bright beginning has been too powerful to resist.

Stream: Axolotl: Pneuma

Posted by Marc Masters in noise on Tue: 10-03-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Charlotte Gainsbourg
“The Operation”
[2006]
★★★½

Serge's baby girl, who can be seen in her day gig as the willowy and luxurious counterpart to Gael Garcia Bernal in Michel Gondry's latest film, hasn't made music in eight years. But one could hardly tell from this Nigel Godrich-produced slice of melodrama. Speak-singing in a hushed but delicious wisp of a voice that is dangerously close to swagger-jacking her father, she poses the gruesomeness of "going under the knife" against the perverse delight of sexual exploration and absorbed love. She sings of going "deep within the abattoir of your entrails, your insides." A lovely image. The song's co-written by Jarvis Cocker (no shocker considering the icky-sticky metaphors at work) and coasts on ambient pangs backed by piano-driven pomp, but it's Gainsbourg's refined ghoulishness that makes her first foray in a long time a rewarding one. Or at least one that will turn your stomach.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in French pop on Tue: 10-03-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Aly and AJ
“Chemicals React”

[2006]
★★½
Aly and AJ follow the belated success of the self-discovery anthem “Rush”, huge on Radio Disney but a relative blip on the Billboard charts, with an MOR pop-rock trifle that's got one foot in the arena. For a song with such an obvious conceit (the relationship is complicated but makes sense when the chemicals react), the wordplay is half-hearted; "I'm out of my element” is about as punny as it gets. It pales in comparison to Hilary Duff's "The Math”, pretty much the same premise, different school subject. What's interesting is that the chemicals in question clearly refer to biological urges commonly associated with hot, sinful premarital sex, which doesn't quite mesh with the duo's wholesome image or their latent fundamentalism. That's probably a good thing, but the conflict doesn't lead the song anywhere interesting. What if they finally realized that they **ain't nuthin' but mammals after all**?

Stream: Aly and AJ: Chemicals React

Posted by David Moore in pop on Tue: 10-03-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dierks Bentley
“Every Mile a Memory”
[2006]
★★½

The acoustic intro's just a fake-out. This isn't a lonely country lament, but another power ballad with Nashville fringe. Dierks does melodrama pretty well though. He sings just slightly off key, which initially is offputting but ultimately gives the illusion that he's just a regular dude singing along to the radio. Plus, this unassuming approach compensates for the song's ho-hum lyrics, which manifest emotional distance as a remote backroad while reflecting heartbreak through a rearview mirror. "Every song another scene/ From some old movie going back in time" is a good, concrete line, with memories hitting you with the relentless click of mile markers and Cracker Barrels. But "every night, a lonesome sound/ Like a freight train rollin' through my dreams" is hogwash, a throwaway simile that traffics in easy country identifiers. Failing to transcend songwriting contrivance, "Every Mile a Memory" doesn't add much to the can't-drive-away-from-your-misery subgenre, despite Bentley's foot-on-the-floor delivery.

Stream: Dierks Bentley: Every Mile a Memory

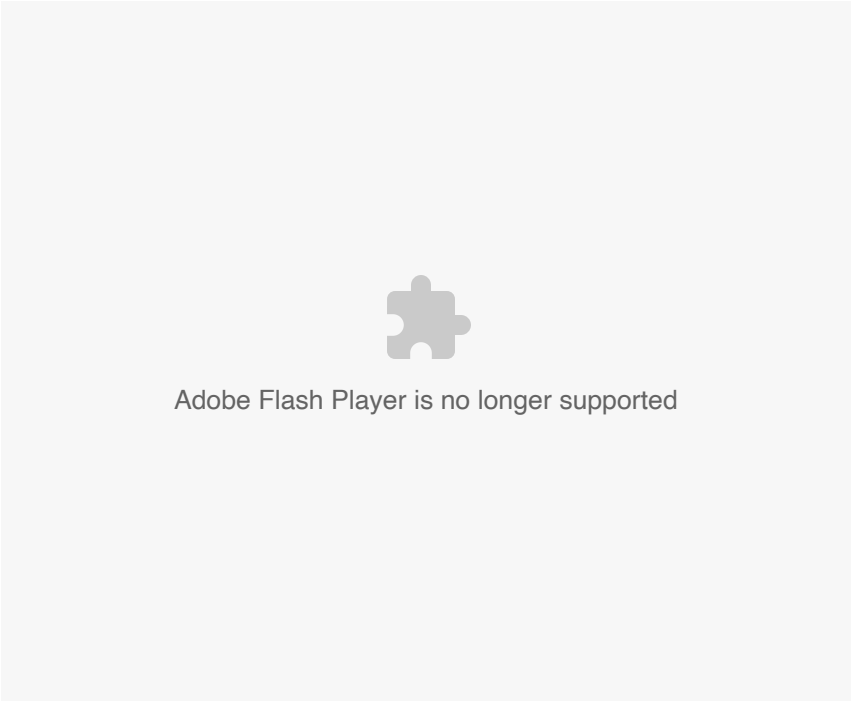
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Tue: 10-03-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Yuksek
“Composer”
[2006]
★★
Beginning like co-Parisian SebastiAn's heavily chopped electro, Yuksek quickly gives himself the French version of a rewind: "Let's start again." When he starts again, his belchy riff is almost immediately swallowed by the doofiest Euro-dance since Aqua broke up. Less leathery than its hair-techno counterparts, "Composer" contains about a minute of rolling madness that might nicely fill the fleeting Rosé-induced frenzy at the crescendo of your set. Unfortunately, that minute is rudely split in half by the most ridiculous breakdown since *Animal House*, as if Yuksek expects the whole party to squat-bounce on the floor as he smokes Gitanes. I don't know what "Yuksek" means or what Yuksek means by "Composer", but I do know that if you want to make a club record, you don't stop yourself twice in the process.

Stream: Yuksek: Composer

Posted by Peter Macia in dance on Tue: 10-03-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Excepter
“The Rock Stepper”
[2006]
★★★★



Excepter's shift from a collective of droning noiseniks to four-man cracked-disco band isn't as radical as the catchy "Rock Stepper" makes it seem. The rest of *Alternation* has a healthy share of the group's trademark woozy beats, zombified moans, and warped synth squiggles. Still, anyone who's followed Excepter's hypnotic path should be pleasantly surprised by the hooky lilt and insistent pulse of this cut, which John Fell Ryan and Dan Hougland actually wrote years ago before their dance-rock plans got derailed by an addiction to sprawling improv. How much you like the track will likely hinge on your opinion of Ryan's lethargic singing, which crawls through Excepter songs like a drugged animal lumbering through woods in search of sunlight. To me, his ghostly voice turns "The Rock Stepper" from clever diversion into compelling art/dance hybrid akin to the Residents' oddball concoctions, making it the best track on one of the best albums of the year.

MP3: Excepter: The Rock Stepper (Edit)
Posted by Marc Masters in dance on Mon: 10-02-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Girls Aloud
“Something Kinda Ooh”
[2006]
★★★½

Something went wrong :(

It appears you are running Ruffle on the "file:" protocol.

This doesn't work as browsers block many features from working for security reasons.

Instead, we invite you to setup a local server or either use the web demo or the desktop application.

On "Something Kinda Ooh", the single from the group's forthcoming best-of, Girls Aloud jump right into a club track that feels like it's about 90% chorus, trying really really hard to get something kinda ooh bumpin' in the back room. And of course they do. They come on pretty strong, all power-synths and cardio-facilitating throb, and you can't resist the hooks. But they're not irresistible, just relentless. Not necessarily a criticism-- you can dance to it (you kind of have to)-- but there's nothing hiding in the corners, no quirks to explore. It scorches, but the trade-off is that there's no room to get comfortable, no room for them to charm or wink. They say they've only got until three o'clock to heat it up/rock 'til you drop, and then they party like it's 2:59.

Posted by David Moore in pop on Mon: 10-02-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Dntel
"Rock My Boat"
B-Side: Dntel
"Everything's Tricks"
[2006]
A-Side: ★★½
B-Side: ★★★½
Jimmy Tamborello runs through personas like professional wrestlers. While his Postal Service work earned him a Hulk Hogan-sized appreciation in emo circles, his true calling lies in Dntel's devilish Hollywood Hogan electro-glitch heel. Problem is, persona-hopping's getting harder these days for Tamborello, especially with this pesky James Figurine alter-ego throwing a wrench in the schizo mess. Hoping to trip those Dntel wires, *Life Is Full of Possibilities* guest star Mia Doi Todd drops in on "Rock My Boat", a sexy faux-Morcheeba track that does mouth-to-mouth but can't quite resuscitate. "Everything's Tricks", on the other hand, enters on a rumbling techno march, reintroducing Dntel like an action sequel's returning villain. No more tenderized IDM to scrawl your sappy poetry to, just a desolate soundscape with looped vocals as the only signs of human life.
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Mon: 10-02-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cornelius
"Music"
[2006]
★★★
Four years after his last effort, *Point*, your favorite Japanese experimental pop wizard and mine (sorry, Shugo, sometimes it's you) hasn't changed up his act much. But hey, maybe he's had more important commitments

recently. "We need music," he pronounces in full Beach Boys harmonies on lead single "Music". Color me not quite convinced. The clipped acoustic guitar hits update *Point*'s "Point of View Point", joined by thumping bass drums, siren synths, and assorted blips/bleeps. It's tough to tell what the Japanese verses might be saying, but my guess is it has something to do with the subject of music. Too bad it sounds like mere math most times, though coruscating bloops/blaps later in the song serve as a post-psychedelic reminder why we need the stuff so bad in the first place, i.e. music. It sounds really good on an empty mind. What?

Stream: Cornelius: Music

Posted by Marc Hogan in indie rock on Mon: 10-02-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Veronicas
"4ever"
[2006]
★★★★

"Since U Been Gone" was huge at Pitchfork a year ago, so I expected the Veronicas' now-ancient first single (Max Martin producing again, plus Dr. Luke Gottwald) to get some love. It's not derivative of the former but an expansion of the palette: Call the Veronicas a 21st century girl-group and Martin/Gottwald Phil Spector if you like, because their own Back to Mono-style retrospective seems to gain a potential track every other week. Here they add a cutting tritone riff, embellish the harmonies, crank the energy up on the verses, and then give the soaring chorus catharsis a mathematical boost-- nine money high notes over Kelly Clarkson's comparably paltry four. The humor is overt; it's a double come-on that eschews "yearning" or "empowerment" or whatever for no-strings-attached fun, except there's playful menace running through it (turns out the Veronicas are pulling the strings), so you know they might just be fucking with this guy. They probably think it's hilarious.

Stream: The Veronicas: 4ever

Posted by David Moore in pop on Mon: 10-02-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ryan Adams
"Welcome to Ryan Adams Dot Com Motherfucka (Aw Shit)"
[2006]
★★★

Ryan Adams is an asshole. I know it. You know it. His girlfriend knows it. His dog knows it. Most important, he knows it. He even told this website as much last year: "Everybody can't be cool. Somebody's gotta be the fucking dork. And I'm the dork. Or the asshole, or whatever." He's absolutely right, everybody *can't* be cool. If hype machine fanboys didn't have assholes like Adams to bitch about, there would be a lot more talk of how the Junior Boys are "really great to jog to" and how your buddy "has a hunch" about Sufjan's next state (Oregon) and how the TV on the Radio record "is, like, the aural equivalent of America in 2006." And that would be really fucking sad. Balance is key. If Ryan Adams can tip the scales ever so slightly by questioning the existence of kevincostner.com and impersonating witches, Yoda, and Jim DeRogatis, he's playing his part well.

Stream: Ryan Adams: Welcome to Ryan Adams Dot Com Motherfucka (Aw Shit)

Posted by Ryan Dombal in wtf on Fri: 09-29-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tiny Vipers
"Shipwreck"
[2006]
★★★½

Seattle seems to take pride in its sloppy cut-the-bullshit ethos, and fittingly homegrown, newly fitted Sub Pop artist Tiny Vipers, aka Jesy Fortino, strips Joanna Newsom's en vogue freak-folk down to little more than a guitar and four-track. Unlike Newsom's beloved Lisa Simpson cooing though, Fortino is dreary, taking no flights of fancy. Her grief's bigger than yours, is the effect-- too real to hide behind a harp or woodwind section. What starts dewy-eyed with "We'll find a way" ends more somberly, polished off by Fortino's icy European chanteuse vox in the tradition of Nico and, more recently, Gustav: "I'm dying/I grow smaller each and every day, weaker

still/ At least I'm trying." Talk about discontent-- Vipers is nihilistic enough to be the Emerald City's best attempt at blowing up the outside world in ten years, yet content to sit sulking in a dingy, one-person flat.

MP3: Tiny Vipers: Shipwreck

Posted by Adam Moerder in rock on Fri: 09-29-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Young Jeezy
"I Love It"
[2006]
★★★½

It makes sense that Young Jeezy would want to rip off T.I.'s "What You Know". "What You Know" is, after all, the biggest and best rap song of the year, a million-watt blare of swagger that might itself be T.I.'s take on the hegemonic synth booms of Jeezy's debut. But "I Love It" ranks up there with Lil Romeo's Lil Bow Wow impression on the blatancy scale. Jeezy hires DJ Toomp, the producer of "What You Know", to recreate the regal, smeary synth riff and almighty bass throb of T.I.'s song, and he uses the exact same breathless cadence that T.I. already used on the chorus. On a monolithic track like this, Jeezy's gravelly rumble sounds immortal, and his ad-libs still haven't gotten old. His motivational roars are still as blissfully nonspecific as ever: "I live for the moment, Lord knows I'm gon' die/ And when I get to Hell, Lord knows I'm gon' fry, ha ha!" And none of that matters much, since a track like this would be amazing no matter who was rapping on it. Another rapper might've figured out a more subtle way to rip off "What You Know," but Jeezy's never done subtle, and he still has a world to conquer.

Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Fri: 09-29-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jóhann Jóhannsson
"Part 2 - IBM 1403 Printer"
[2006]
★★★½

The IBM 1403 printer was a hulk: Four feet tall and just as wide, it was introduced in 1959 to accompany the mammoth 1401 processor, and used 132 tiny hammers to pound 4,800 lines each minute. It was loud. Recordings of the behemoth *idling* sound like an Eno/Prurient mash-up, unflinching aural scowls from another world softened into involving though tolerable ambiance.

Here, Jóhann Jóhannsson samples that mechanical drift for 70 seconds. He subtly pitch-shifts against it as a staid American engineer speaks: "We now come to the general mechanism. Every six months, check the oil level of the drive-housing and, if necessary, top off with IBM 15." As Jóhannsson builds a computerized orchestra from a Hammond B-3 plugged into a laptop, those instructions click on for seven minutes. At its fullest, their accompaniment sounds like the most triumphant moment of a paint-by-numbers Disney score, overly obvious orchestral gestures swelling, slicing, and tugging for tears. But the hum of the printer remains its undercarriage, letting Jóhannsson master context and consequence: As he sees it, this 40-year-old machine was the dreamy start of a symbiotic relationship between two caretakers, machine and its man.

Posted by Grayson Currin in experimental on Fri: 09-29-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Keith Urban
"Once in a Lifetime"
[2006]
★

Just a few months after marrying a certain popular movie star, Keith Urban has released as his new single a paean to marriage and devotion, addressed to a very special "you." I'd be remiss not to point that out. That context, for better or worse, colors every note of this song, from its saccharine lyrics to its conservative arrangement to its overdramatic melody.

Real-life romance has inspired some winners in the past ("Ring of Fire", for example). Yet on "Once in a Lifetime", the opportunity to appeal to fans who might not have heard of Urban before he showed up on that beach with Nicole means the song wears its countryness like clip-on earrings. The most notable part of "Lifetime", besides that obvious Coldplay-baiting chorus, is its corny heartbeat-rhythm drums; you love with your heart, in case you forgot. So maybe the song's intentionally bland: Maybe Urban's shooting for the lowest common denominator to attract the widest audience. But bland here means colossally forgettable, even for that someone somewhere who likes the song as a love letter to Urban's new bride. Everyone's much better off just watching *To Die For*.

Stream: Keith Urban: Once in a Lifetime
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Fri: 09-29-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

My My
“Lifetime Trick”
[2006]
★★★★

In dance music, a four-song 12-inch is usually three songs too many. DJs only tend to play one side anyway, two if the party goes late and they're running low on fresh wax. But Berlin's My My cram their debut outing for Paris's Circus Company label-- a weekend away from their usual home on Playhouse-- with four proper A-side jams. Expect to see all of them cropping up on 2007's better mix CDs. They're all of a piece, each one a charmingly clunky assemblage of sprightly drum programming, ragged oscillator squeals and smeary samples with more color than a late-summer blackberry. Of them all, "Lifetime Trick" is the most controlled, playing its multiply sourced drum samples like Pachinko balls and draping deeply mournful keyboards over it all. Caught with its hand in snap music's cookie jar, and jerky like Isolée at his most robotic (but with jazz brushes in place of glitched bits), it's an atmospheric study in contrast from which there's no escape but straight through the heaving masses, and into the light.

Stream: My My: Lifetime Trick
Posted by Philip Sherburne in dance on Thu: 09-28-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

STL
“The Early Tracks”
[2006]
★★★★

On a label whose releases all seem to run in increasingly wobbly rings away from an already unstable center, Stephan Laubner may be Perlon's most eccentric artist yet. He's only published a few "dance" tracks for the label, while the majority of his output remains phonography-based ambient music on his own Something imprint. But this 30-minute (or infinite, if you count the two locked grooves) *Early Tracks* EP manages to have it both ways at once, folding blips and birdcalls and antsy bass lines together with resonances about as obvious as the sound of hair curling.

These five deeply contradictory tracks are, ironically, far more functionalist than almost anything Perlon has put out in years. From the dully thumping downbeats to the agreeably lo-fi bass thwack, everything's topsy-turvy-- lopsided lock grooves so hypnotic you'd think they're "real" tracks, and full-fledged compositions wearing infinity's cinched-belt disguise, at least until they denude themselves with a wink and an unexpected half-step up the scale. The painfully short interlude "Out of My Head," meanwhile, is like Kanye for the Panoramabar set: a Chipmunked vocal, a Rhodes sample that'll have Moodymann calling Crimestoppers, and eternity compressed into eight perfect bars.

Posted by Philip Sherburne on Thu: 09-28-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Of Montreal
“Heimdalsgate Like a Promethean Curse”
[2006]

★★★½

From their album that won't come out until next year, "Heimdalsgate" takes up the drugs-as-artistic-inspiration vs. drugs-as-personal-ruin dilemma and plays it out with equally conflicted musical gestures. "I'm in a crisis/ I need help/ Come on mood-shift/ Shift back to good again," sings Kevin Barnes over some rocky keyboard; in appropriate zero-to-60 fashion, the song is suddenly riding a synth riff into the "thorny path" Barnes conveniently forgot he created. Submerged in denial, he insists, "Chemicals don't strangle my pen/ Chemicals don't make me sick again"-- which is brilliant, because it's just as much a plea for mercy, i.e. "Chemicals, don't strangle my pen!" "Heimdalsgate" is one of the more breakneck, "old Of Montreal"-styled songs on an otherwise discofunk-lite album, bringing proper attention to itself without overextending its theme.

Posted by Andy Dubbin in indie rock on Thu: 09-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Swollen Members
"Put Me On [ft. Everlast]"
[2006]
½

I first experienced this Canadian rap group when they opened for Ghostface last year in New York City. One member looked like a buff Terence Trent D'arby, the other a blond Fred Durst. After a few songs, they were eventually booed off the stage. I forgot about them. Then, almost a year later, I received an e-mail with a Swollen Members "personal message" video attached. "Yo Ryan, what's up man?" asked the Darby dude before launching into a brief plug for his new album. While I'm still a little creeped-out by the video, there are bigger problems. These guys have won three Juno Awards. They're on their fourth LP. People buy their albums.

Their startling ineptitude is on full display on this loved-up single "featuring" Everlast aka Mr. Whitey Ford, who has spent the last six years working on lines like, "She's a hot one, ain't no one illa/ Butter pecan and french vanilla." Even worse, the Members spit like they're getting paid by the "guh." But what sets these guys apart from other crap-rap is their unwavering rose-colored sense of self. While most would cower when faced with vocal rejection from hundreds of hooded Wu fans, Swollen Members stood strong and pleaded for one more song. While others blow off press interviews, these guys are making dozens of critic-specific videos pumping their cause. Through misguided tenacity and perseverance, Swollen Members have created a frightening model of successful failure. It should not be emulated.

Video: Swollen Members: Put Me On [ft. Everlast]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Thu: 09-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Julie Sokolow
"Your Wrists"
[2006]
★★★½

"Your Wrists" is minimal in every way, just Julie Sokolow's voice singing a simple melody over the scratchy lo-fi strum of an acoustic guitar. Considering her smoky self-harmonizing vocals, you'd expect her to wrench maximum pathos out of this semi-obsessive tune á la early Cat Power, but Sokolow (bravely) opts for understatement instead. "I knocked on your door, I knocked on your door, is this the type of thing one takes medicine for," she begins, letting us know what's at stake but stating it plainly. By the time her lethargic, gently bouncing syllables roll into the finale ("You would find me time-consuming, you would find me burdening/ You would find me upside down on your front lawn, singing you're the only one, you're the only one..."), she still hasn't lost her matter-of-fact tone. She's resigned to pine, forever-- but that's cool. That last plateau of unrequited longing, before one begins the getting-over-of-it, is near impossible to document without resorting to self-pity or melodrama. Sokolow nails it without so much as tousling her hair.

Stream: Julie Sokolow: Your Wrists
Posted by Jason Crock in rock on Thu: 09-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Game
“Let's Ride (Strip Club)”
[2006]
★

Give your dad a one-sentence synopsis of Game's career-- dubious gangster catches Dr. Dre's ear but pisses off Dr. Dre's moneymaker, 50 Cent, then spends the rest of his time clamoring for attention from both-- and, without even hearing it, he could probably karaoke to "Let's Ride", the first official single from *The Devil's Advocate*. What an embarrassment this song turned out to be, lumberingly obvious and poorly crafted from the first awkward gang reference to the last Dre namedrop. Nobody has said "G-Unot" for months. Come on. The "Hug me, Dre" desperation could bring a tear to the eye of the confused, *Documentary*-loving hangbanger on the back wall-- but that's about it. This guy really needs to stop giving the West Coast mouth-to-mouth.

Stream: The Game: Let's Ride
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Wed: 09-27-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bowerbirds
“In Our Talons”
[2006]
★★★★

These days, when even "South Park" still snarks Al Gore for not toeing the Exxon line, Bowerbirds speak for the trees. (Full disclosure: Bowerbirds are recording their debut LP for a label run by Pitchfork staffer Grayson Currin.)

On "In Our Talons", the Raleigh, N.C. duo take up creepy big-band melodies, gypsy folk accordion, and feathered boy/girl harmonies, then spread them out in the open spaces of Red House Painters acoustic guitar. It'd be crunchy like Count Devendra, but Phil Moore and Beth Tacular are the undirty, melodic type of hippie (no, for serious). Jazzbo deet-deet-deets and ominous metaphors nearly camouflage the song's theme, at least till the Bowers lunge into a coda as obvious as the sun and fragile as the glaciers: "It takes a lot of nerve to destroy this wondrous earth." You know, maybe having a planet doesn't suck. There's David Brooks, yes, but at least there are songs.

Stream: Bowerbirds: In Our Talons
Posted by Marc Hogan in indie rock on Wed: 09-27-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Richard Buckner
“Town”
[2006]
★★★

For most of his decade-plus career, Richard Buckner has been cast off as a singer-songwriter. It's becoming abundantly clear, though, that he's more of a singer-poet, somehow able to transform, somewhat seamlessly, extremely esoteric poetry into *songs* simply by *singing* them. Songwriting's just not that simple, usually.

Nowhere is this clearer than "Town", the first cut from *Meadow*. His loose-strung guitar jogs in, then that stoned-and-slurred voice takes the reins for four minutes. The arrangement is self-acceptingly static, J.D. Foster's drumming and Doug Gillard's repetitive mid-tone riff bowing to Buckner's burl like pieces of paper accepting ink. Written out, the lyrics come tucked inside parentheses and below quotation marks, while periods and question marks and exclamation points offer guideposts. Buckner ignores such punctuation on tape, treating the words like collections of pliable things to be fastened to an idiosyncratic sense of verse and chorus, emphasis given only with his snarled-lip, mid-word note dips. "Are you sitting down? Have you heard around about the bust you beat/ When you were back in town?" he wonders. Those are two questions he won't repeat.

Posted by Grayson Currin in indie rock on Wed: 09-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Megan McCauley
“Tap That”
[2006]
★★★½
Evanescent goth girl Megan McCauley signs up with Max Martin and Dr. Luke, and they help her ace the single that Pink couldn't quite nail with "U + Ur Hand". There are shades of Pink's former agony in the chorus, but elsewhere McCauley channels Salt-n-Pepa (and Pink). She flirts her way through cowbells and chorus-anticipating guitar crunch in the first verse until it all boils over according to plan into shouting, dirty fantasies, and domination. After that she switches personalities at random, from pushy ("kiss the ring") to coyly oblique ("maybe we can do something that sometimes leads to other things") but loses some of the initial charisma, even if the song itself never lets up. Pink has the edge on her there; she's always Pink regardless of what kind of mess is happening around her. But McCauley's performance never detracts from the production, which is air-tight as usual.

Stream: Megan McCauley: Tap That

Posted by David Moore in pop on Wed: 09-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dan Deacon
“Big Big Big Big Big”
[2006]
★★★
Presenting Dan Deacon: one part children's TV show theme, one part oblique freak-folk, 100 percent crazy. Here he hardly curbs his caterwauling, instead whittling verses out of maniacally repeated words like "big" and "steak." Despite these antics, the song's bouncy, cartoonish chord progression maintains a certain accessibility, eventually exploding into brief but coherent organ grandeur. Even Deacon's not made of stone, and he plays off the organ by belting a heartfelt hook: "I'm down on my hands/ I'm down on my knees/ I'm beggin' ya now/ I'm beggin' ya please." After that, more Raffi sound effects, and Dan Deacon's Playhouse returns to its regularly scheduled programming.

Stream: Dan Deacon: Big Big Big Big Big

Posted by Adam Moerder in electronic on Wed: 09-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Audioslave
“Original Fire”
[2006]
★½
Bad Company, a supergroup from a very different era, caught some flack for their surly macho pose and caveman sexuality. But they stayed multi-platinum because their bloozy guitar stabs were so chunky and magnetic. Bad Co., like manager Peter Grant's other client, Led Zeppelin, knew that a great riff means never having to say you're sorry. On "Original Fire" Audioslave sounds like Bad Co.'s inversion: The politics are considered, if the inspirational sentiment is cheap; but the guitar hook has the virile potency of a common earthworm, and Morello's baffling wa-wa screech of a solo is a fooling-nobody gym sock stuffed down Chris Cornell's pants. I'll always love his voice
though.

Stream: Audioslave: Original Fire

Posted by Mark Richardson in jurassic rock on Tue: 09-26-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

JoJo
“Too Little Too Late”
[2006]
★★★½

Though Justin, Britney and Christina have grown up on us, the ageless teen-pop machine still chugs along. At 15, singer-actress Joanna Levesque has already given us hits ("Leave (Get Out)", "Baby It's You"), flicks (*RV*,

Aquamarine) and *Tiger Beat* fodder (J-Kwon, Bow Wow), but this sure-to-be No. 1 smash just may be the sole reason for her existence on this earth. JoJo is a fine cipher, but the main catalyst behind this kiss-off is (of course) some guy named Billy Steinberg. Like most pop masterminds of note, the vet songwriter (partially responsible for many a young-woman confessional including Madonna's "Like A Virgin", Cyndi Lauper's "True Colors", and the Bangles' "Eternal Flame") is just another vaguely melancholic nostalgist stuck daydreaming in fifth period chemistry. Along with producer Josh Alexander, Steinberg crafts seamless girl-power gloss here, especially on the astounding, pitch-perfect hook that Daft Punk really should rip off sooner than later. Please try to forget that JoJo will look exactly like Fergie in 20 years.

Video: JoJo: Too Little Too Late
Posted by Ryan Dombal in pop on Tue: 09-26-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Decemberists
“O, Valencia!”
[2006]
★★★★

In a tragic love story that follows the tried/true "secret lovers/feuding families" motif (see also: *Picaresque*'s "We Both Go Down Together"), Colin Meloy and the Decemberists defy a seemingly inexorable tone of melancholy with upbeat chords and lively drums. Granted, sad lyrics vs. happy music is nothing new for them either (e.g. "July, July"), but when the song's protagonist calls out "I'll burn this whole city down!" when his girl's shot down, and the track's namechecking the historically/repeatedly fire-ravaged town of Valencia, the line about his love's "blood still warm on the ground" carries a bit more, we'll say, oomph. Syntactically, city and lost love become one in the last chorus ("O, Valencia!"), the protagonist cries out at both in anguish, and you wonder whether the accompanying music's positive force is optimism, or just escapism.

Stream: The Decemberists: O, Valencia!
Posted by Andy Dubbin in indie rock on Tue: 09-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dark Meat
“Freedom Ritual”
[2006]
★★★★
"Freedom Ritual", the opening track from Georgia's sometime 30-member psychedelic trickster collective Dark Meat, sprawls slowly but completely, with a bustling midsection and a distended collapse into darkness. A capella, Page Campbell parses out a verse in serene alto before delivering the stanza that will eventually close the track: "And I'll die poor and hopeful with one color in mind." When she pauses, a Boris-sized slab of tube-amp buzz slices in, invoking a massive rhythm section to slap down like frantic fucksticks on sunburned skin. The next seven minutes hustle through the s-curves of verses, huge guitars, Ayler-squawking horns, and a Campbell-led chorus conquering the parts when Jim McHugh isn't prophesying of the hills and wars of some mysterious Tolkien-sized voyage.
Posted by Grayson Currin in rock on Tue: 09-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pink Spiders
“Little Razorblade”
[2006]
★★
Nothing gets my goat like freewheeling high school power-pop gone awry, and this song pretty much finks out after its lofty Cars-minded opener. All the pieces are more or less in place for a solid post-Weezer gem here-- the Budokan-approved power chords, the intermittent hooks, the aw-shucks attitude-- though none of it can hide the fact that the Spiders' hearts are worn on the sleeve of an Abercrombie shirt. An exploded heart, this pop overload packs synthesizers and glitz on a naturally bare-bones garage rocker. Adding to the tackiness, Spiders throw about four ho-hum bridges into the patchwork, biding their time between fist-pumping choruses. Maybe when

they muster enough confidence not to rely on cheap one-off hooks, we'll have ourselves something more worthwhile than a sub-"Laguna Beach" party band.

Stream: Pink Spiders: Little Razorblade

Posted by Adam Moerder in rock on Tue: 09-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Paris Hilton
“Nothing in This World”
[2006]
★★★½

Turns out there some great songs on this album, and here’s one of them. Dr. Luke sans Max Martin does the Luke/Max rock template, replacing angst or anger or whatever else with love-on-the-dancefloor Kylieism and boyfriend-stealing spite. The standard driving rock beat is replaced with steady-sailing dance-pop bounce, and there are some needly upbeat guitars guiding the song’s playful melody, with occasional synth decoration. It’s a fairly understated, sophisticated production, and Paris steals the show with one of her strongest performances. She matches the song’s energy with her modest but distinctive pipes instead of trying to force her way above it like a diva. She’s not a diva, but she does have a lovely voice, and for what it's worth (a lot), she sounds like she’s having fun. Dah dah, dah dah da-dah dah—she’s, like, likable.

Stream: Paris Hilton: Nothing in This World

Posted by David Moore in pop on Mon: 09-25-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cyann & Ben Cyann & Ben
“Sweet Beliefs”
[2006]
★★★★

Play along here: This is how Laika must've felt. Not the band, or the Arcade Fire joint mind you, but the dog, the one the Ruskies shot into space back when we called them Ruskies and people cared about space. It's 2006, and Cyann & Ben are French, and they care about space. Like a shuttle launch in slow-motion, "Sweet Beliefs" propels with quiet majesty, but its drama stems from texture rather than tempo, relentless drift rather than crescendo. C&B employ layered guitars, pianos, and keyboards that reach just a little bit more with each successive verse-chorus orbit, while vocalist Cyann transmits a hushed meditation on change and loss in clipped English. Her voice could use a bit more gravity and warmth to ride the instrumentation's interstellar pull-- and the lyrics clunk a mite-- but the message is clear, and likely devastating to its intended audience: "Can't you see/ I'm no longer/ The same as before," she wails.

Could be a mere romance's end, but the music-- not unlike the minds of the bereft-- paints it in grand, cataclysmic strokes, in the hue of the big yellow paradox of not knowing what you had until you've lost it. Like our doomed canine comrade, we're hit at once with the awe of witnessing the Earth (or that which was) in all its enormity, and the grim notion that we'll never return to it. We all know how screams fare in space; turns out they can't hear you whimper there either.

Stream: Cyann & Ben: Sweet Beliefs

Posted by Matthew Solarski in space folk on Mon: 09-25-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Stephen Malkmus
“Kindling for the Master (Major Swellings Remix)”
B-Side: Stephen Malkmus
“Kindling for the Master (Hot Chip Remix)”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★★
B-Side: ★★★★

Nine outta 10 times I'll take tracky rocks over rocky tracks, but these Malkmus remixes (mostly) succeed because they make room for both, treating neither as normative. Granted, it'd be hard to fuck up such a good

song as "Kindling" and its steady, churning internal logic. But Polmo Polpo almost does, diverting Malkmus' irreverence into a desultory glitch-fest. That explains why he's D-side. Major Swellings' B is the real gem: Lindstrøm-Prins Thomas' coyer half (the Prins), Major has a great ear for detail, honing in on the song's glassy background textures and slight keyboard ostinatos, then underpinning with a super-heavy one-note bassline-- his invention.

Malkmus' precious, scat-like vocal delivery might have hobbled the original; at the very least, it did his typically cryptic, tantalizingly economical lyrics no favors. Sensing injustice, Hot Chip take up the words' case like a team of ambulance chasers. Their mix surrounds Malkmus in plaintive analog synths; as a result, lines like "Everybody's got a heart to sink" now unspool more heartfelt than silly. Emperor Machine approaches more directly, pairing the song's hookiest bytes ("Kind-ling for the masta, masta") to drumline stomp and swooshing triads. As sure as Major's mix was built for the dancefloor, this funkily amusing version registers hardest in the car at 50.

Posted by Sam Ubl in dance on Mon: 09-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Daughters
“Fiery”
[2006]
★★★½

This sort of pigfuckery often travels under openly nihilistic banners. But instead of going for "Unplanned Teen Pregnancy" or "Bovine Rape Squad" or something, this Rhode Island spaz outfit chose the much ickier-by-insinuation name "Daughters", which can't help but sound sinister in this decidedly unwholesome context. Nobody's children should be doing shit like this. "Fiery" is for people with facial tattoos and scary neck beards (and, um, me) who wish McLusky had been just a little crazier. Trebly IED guitars shower rusty nails over the smoldering wreckage of chords, drunkenly weaving bass suddenly evens out into a snarling lope, Alexis Marshall's satanic soapbox prophecies sound surprisingly credible, and in the widening gyre, the center seems to hold only by the grace of infernal Providence.

Stream: Daughters: Fiery
Posted by Brian Howe in rock on Mon: 09-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Adem
“Spirals”
[2006]
★★★★

Adem writes heart-on-the-microphone confessions for sure, but he's a clever wordsmith, and his textured arrangements serve the songs, not just themselves. On “Spirals” he forgoes dexterity for simplicity, letting his feelings drift over a single, finger-picked acoustic guitar, every chord change pronounced with callused experience. It works, too: Like the best love, this seems entirely unaffected and natural, as though Adem had a moment with someone special, wrote a song on a coffeeshop receipt and recorded it an hour later in the living room. “And yet the smallest vibrations, like the touch of your pen, make my hair stand on end,” he coos, singing about his paramour drawing doves on the back of his hand. Who she is, who knows. To me, he’s talking about someone 4,300 miles away. I hope, for you, he’s talking about the person you’ll meet for dinner in a few hours.

Posted by Grayson Currin in rock on Mon: 09-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Clipse
“Time's Up Freestyle [ft. Ab-Liva and Sandman]”
[2006]
★★★★½

The beat of O.C.'s "Time's Up" is one of those almighty masterpieces of rap minimalism: just a shivering live-bass wobble and a muted snare. Still, you could use your fingers to count the rap groups throughout history who could keep it sounding fresh for ten minutes straight.

Clipse have proved themselves many times over, suffusing their crack-rap hyperrealism with enough dense, tangled imagery to keep us picking their lines apart. But when this thing comes to an end, this appearance on Shade 45, they leave us wishing it was twice as long. Pusha T's breathless fragments keep finding new ways to say the same things: "Open the frigidaire, 25 to life in there/ So much white you might think ya holy Christ was near." Malice's matter-of-fact precision has a new urgency all of a sudden: "The whole rap world watched the Clipse take a bow/ We left it in ya hands, you ain't make father proud." Philly compadres Sandman and Ab-Liva are along for the ride, and their gravelly sputters mostly serve to balance out the Virginia brothers' nasal monotones. But they're still coming up with better lines than we have a right to expect from any mixtape rapper: "I was moving fishscale when Diamond D talked about Ishmael/ Now I see ya sales looking dismal," says Sandman.

This is a freestyle, so the beat is too low in the background, but it also means we get to hear these guys cheering each other on, laughing at each other's jokes. And then, at the end: "The album coming late August." And we know that isn't true. *Hell Hath No Fury* won't see the light of day until mid-November if it even ever comes out at all, and that's a fucking tragedy.

Stream: Clipse: Time's Up Freestyle [ft. Ab-Liva and Sandman]
Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Fri: 09-22-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pelle Carlberg
"Musikbyran Makes Me Wanna Smoke Crack"
[2006]
★★★★

Over a year after its release in his native Sweden, the unbelievably canny album by this 37-year-old father of four is due for a stateside launch, and it opens with a total fanbreeder. Carlberg can't arrange a song that doesn't sound like an *If You're Feeling Sinister* outtake, and he coyly lays on the Morriseyan contradictions as if flashing velvet testes. The title is of course a reference to Beck's above-it-all song about (his benefactory) MTV, only Sweden's Musikbyran sends Carlberg into spasms of self-importance and self-pity via a segment about Springsteen visiting Warren Zevon's deathbed. He doesn't think his busy friends would come if he was terminally ill, Carlberg, and he fears that his songs haven't reach enough mortals to immortalize him.

A great line from Whit Stillman's film *Barcelona* gets exemplified here, the one about how tragedies "only reach us filtered through our own colossal egotism." The almost overfamiliar organs and tambourines are part of the galling charm; this guy always sounds as anxious about, and repulsed by, fame's famous trappings even while he hungrily (and beautifully) coos for them. If more twee acts balanced wit, bile, and heart like this track does, they wouldn't bore their detractors off of so many balconies. May Carlberg's cult explode to achieve this song's goal: for someone to say "oh what a pity" when he widows us.

Posted by William Bowers in swede pop on Fri: 09-22-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Boris and Sunn O)))
"Akuma No Kuma"
[2006]
★★★½

"Akuma No Kuma" stays mostly in Sunn O))) territory, at least in the beginning, with a single unchanging chord that's too low to hum and too unidentifiable to feign complete comfort with. It's a pleasant, less-of-this-world vibe that changes when the gong hits and electronic flutters multiply and dissolve, leaving hellishly screaming trails behind them. Joe Preston-- who apparently introduced Sunn and Boris, and is maybe best known for his Melvins stint (kidding)-- supplies vocodered vocals a steady inhuman growl. The song stays rooted in scattershot

drumming not rooted in anything, so there is a discernible 4/4 if you concentrate hard enough. Considering the parties involved, I'm a little disappointed.

Posted by Justin Chun in metal on Fri: 09-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Giddy Motors
“Panzrama”
[2006]
★★★
I'll never understand how bands like this stay so angry so long, but thank goodness they do. Steve Albini's always had a close rapport with this London band, but this slow grind twitches too much for it to neatly fall under rank and file Big Black/Jesus Lizard noise. If the Motors stick a boot up your ass, it's going to two-step a little, dabbling in the same jazz experimentalism as Albini's D.C. counterparts Fugazi and, most of all, Shudder to Think. Gaverick de Vis alternates between hushed heckles and full-blown Maynard Keenan emoting, cajoling the band into a brief, over-the-top faux-Tool jam that nearly sinks the track. Fortunately, though, the band comes to their senses in time for one last sober knee to the crotch.
Stream: Giddy Motors: Panzrama
Posted by Adam Moerder in rock on Fri: 09-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Miss Violetta Beauregarde
“I Can't Believe Hedghogs Have a Bone Inside Their Cock”
[2006]
★★★
Fans of Mu's discomfort-dance music and the shrieky Nintendo-scrape of Crystal Castles should not miss this (man-hating, or merely phallus-juggling?) Beauregarde track. In her staggering Italian squeal, Miss Violetta Beauregarde repeatedly asks "Why don't you die?" over a deconstructed video-game loop processed to sound like an apocalyptic club standard. The mounting entendres (references to "salami eating," the line "I'm just your everyday meal," Ron Jeremy's nickname) create a sex-is-violence argument; so the speaker only seems frustrated with how she's not the one instigating it? Beauregarde's whole shtick is to fake the piss-take, as the impact of her samplers, keyboards, and booming drums is too deliberate to be a genre spoof. This outing at least spares the listener her most infamous weapon against electro-hegemeony: jars of glass and nails hooked up to effects pedals, which she calls "death maracas."
Posted by William Bowers in electro on Fri: 09-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Stylofone
“Helen Keller”
[2006]
★★★★
Like Thin Lizzy but less hirsute, Stylofone equate letting the good times roll with tweaking the beat and harmonizing every lead. But the NYC quartet struts straighter, sings softer, and makes funnier off-color jokes than its forebears, e.g. this song's called "Helen Keller". They deserve credit for nailing details few ears will bother to hear-- non-digital crescendos, sly bass slides to carry the vamp, accents all around on the resolving chord. What drummers even fuck with ride bells anymore? Therein (sort of) lies the paradox of Sty's stupid-studied rawk: Like the college kids who wanted to be like the bikers at the bar where bikers beat up college kids, they hope stubborn insistence will earn them respect where they technically shouldn't dare tread. What they forget is what innovation-lovers tend not to realize, either: Reproduction *is* creation. Just ask mom.
Stream: Stylofone: Helen Keller
Posted by Sam Ubl in rock on Thu: 09-21-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lily Allen
“Cheryl Tweedy”
[2006]
★★★
Just so you know, Cheryl Tweedy is one of the lassies from UK pop group Girls Aloud, and is married to a famous soccer player, so this is ostensibly some kind of diss song between two girls who know little misfortune.

It probably could be taken face-value as Lily wishing she could look like Cheryl, but Lily's hardly a straight shooter. It is, though, Allen's concession to a privileged life with her wishing for sobriety, fewer parties, and maybe more meaning. But with the downtempo dancehall beat and massaging keyboards, it's probably just her hangover talking. At this point, you either love or hate Lily's entitled mannerisms, and "Cheryl Tweedy" won't do much to change your mind.
Posted by Peter Macia in pop on Thu: 09-21-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lloyd Banks
“Hands Up [ft. 50 Cent]”
[2006]
★½
You know the G-Unit cause is getting really hopeless when Lloyd Banks-- famous for his hollowed-out cucumber cool-- starts to actually move in his videos. Previously limited to traditional poses like "sitting on a peach leather couch with babes" and "standing to the left side of Yayo," the next Interscope soldier to fall tries to pantomime his song's lyrics while bopping up and down in his pathetic promo clip. Even if his moves are currently being outshined by some American psychobilly, it's admittedly tough to act out lines like "I'm soakin' it all up while your girl suckin' me/ It mean the world to her, it's nothin' but a nut to me"-- on MTV, YouTube, *or* HBO Zone. It's OK though: In an attempt to appease his three female fans, the rapper later acknowledges he's "damn near chauvinist." Ugh. A couple years back, when everything 50 touched went platinum on impact, it made sense for somebody like Banks to put aside his actual skills to exclusively highlight second-grade reading level punches. But now that the dream is as blunted as Eminem's drums, this one-time mixtape assassin can't seem to bring back the ghost.
Video: Lloyd Banks: Hands Up [ft. 50 Cent]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Thu: 09-21-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Vanessa Anne Hudgens
“Come Back to Me”
[2006]
★★
Disney, still riding high on the success of its *High School Musical* sensation (to date, the best-selling album of the year, triple platinum and counting), is now launching two of its alums into the stratosphere of the Disney parallel media universe. First up is "Gabriella", nee Vanessa Anne Hudgens, now “Baby V", who was upstaged in HSM by her lip-syncing beau, Troy (Zac Efron, singing overdubs by Drew Seeley). Alone, she doesn’t really cut it even as a Disney diva. She swipes bits of familiar melodies from all over the place ("Complicated", "Baby Come Back") and pastes them over a flat, nondescript r&b track without ever really finding a hook. Her voice is tentative and nasal, which isn’t necessarily a deal-breaker, but her producers have unwisely given her room to flaunt her pipes. She holds back, like she's still doing kiddie karaoke in the richest public high school in America, where even the gym teachers have mansions.
Stream: Vanessa Anne Hudgens: Come Back To Me
Posted by David Moore in pop on Thu: 09-21-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Aloe Blacc
“One Inna”
[2006]
★★★★½
A singer's conviction rarely vaporizes the schlock and awe of pitiful lyrics. Aloe is no grand writer, relying mostly on familiar soul widgets ("You're one in a million," "You've got a beautiful soul," "Tell me how does it feel/ You got so much appeal," etc.) but his integrity oozes. The Panamanian-born Blacc actually begs a lady to call him by leaving his number in the song (949-8733, ladies). This guy has balls. But where Blacc's album dawdles around in the genre pool, "One Inna" is unyielding thanks to producer Madlib's gushy timpani-and-triangle percussion. It's the only song the Stones Throw impresario orchestrates for his labelmate's solo debut (Blacc rapped on 2005's undie-hop project Emanon), and his voice soars and swoons without letting all those words and numbers get in the way of one of the year's best soul songs.
Stream: Aloe Blacc: One Inna

Posted by Sean Fennessey in soul on Wed: 09-20-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Plastic Little
“Crambodia [ft. Ghostface, Amanda Blank, and Bahamadia]”
[2006]
★★★½

Some will get hung up on whether Plastic Little jacked Ghostface for this verse, how much they paid him, or how many platinum eagles they had made for dude from their own melted-down fillings. Hey: They got their hero on the track, invited all their friends along, case closed. Why ask who-eats-who when Plastic Little are on Vespas wearing Espo raincoats and Ghost is buying some empty bar out? Put his OxyClean gleam against Plastic's love of being broke and sniffing coke and tell me they want the same things from hip-hop. These Philly boys'n'girls are sideline guys, telling jokes, getting onstage and rapping 'cause a rock band is too much work and none too cool to boot. That endlessly, shamelessly looped clap-riff is just fun and games to them; they'll let it play forever, even let the legend play them out on their own track. That the Champ can "out rap" four Plastic Littles and one Amanda Blank with one eye closed, half-asleep, and probably still woozy with whatever they kidnapped him with is just proof he's on a different grind.

Posted by Zach Baron in gallery rap on Wed: 09-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Oxy Cottontail
“Oxy's Anthem”
[2006]
★

Oxy Cottontail (aka Roxy Summers) is an NYC-based party promoter who's been throwing regional-infiltration jams on the East Coast for several years, bringing folks like Houston rap vet Bavu Blakes and "BMore Gutter Music" specialist Aaron LaCrate to Lower East Side clubs for the scads. Like most promoters, she's got a spotty track record, but she's put on enough good parties that not everything she does should be overlooked, so here we are. That said, surrounding yourself with wannabe impresarios and struggling MCs does not make you a candidate for 2006 rap star. Hard to say what got into her here, though if we're to believe the intro to her LaCrate-produced debut track, she's "holding it down here for all these Murderlanders" and "keeping the pussies wet, dripping, steady." Awesome.

Unsurprisingly, Oxy sounds exactly like what she is: A harmless white girl who's never rapped before. Not necessarily a bad thing. But the tired hipster tropes, shrill enunciation, and jumprope-on-the-corner style phrasing are enough to make this a hopefully short foray into mic-gripping. LaCrate's beat is a fairly austere example of his method, layering a boomerang stutter-clap, clipped repetitive horns, and brusque bass. Oxy is not believable as a rap diva, despite the faint reach. Like 50 Cent, however, she sounds most convincing on her spoken-word outros. Here she reveals: "Aaron LaCrate said, 'Roxy you gotta flip a track for me and we're gonna make it the B-side to "Blow"' and I was, 'Yo, are you buuuugging, yo?' and he was like, 'Yes, I am,' and I agreed."

Stream: Oxy Cottontail: Oxy's Anthem
Posted by Sean Fennessey in gallery rap on Wed: 09-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bandy (Kid America Club)
“Kid America Club Theme (Demurgatroid's Triumph)”
[2006]
★★½

Like any reasonable first-time listener, I'm still trying to wrap my mind around Kid America Club's conceit. My best guess: Upwards of 10 cartoon characters that resemble H.R. Puff 'n' Stuff on meth, circling around Speak 'n' Spell beats and celebrating their goofball, pop-cult nihilism in Fraggle voices. This "Theme" gathers them all together on one track. Poltergeist, the Dracula-voiced debutante ghost, is both the silliest and worst MC of the

pack, delivering a gibberish-laced 16, while the aggro Crunchy drops a Phil Spector reference and the Crystals' "Then He Kissed Me" looms under the zippy backbeat. This is what qualifies as avant-garde in today's underground rap wasteland. No surprise former De La Soul A&R Dante Ross is involved; several tracks on the K.A.C.'s new album, *Revenge of the Clubhouse*, feature a similar buoyant sampledelica that Prince Paul tangled with on *3 Feet High and Rising*. End of the day, it's pastiche at its most unnecessary. Yet, even if you can't figure these jokers' goal (Um, fun? Fuckery?) it's at least amusing to watch them kick idiocy.

Stream: Bandy (Kid America Club): Kid America Club Theme
Posted by Sean Fennessey in gallery rap on Wed: 09-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Platinum Pete
“Just a Ho”
[2006]
★½

In which our hero's 27-inch dick and stacks and stacks of money prove worthless before the titular female who, having been disrespected for the duration, takes all the dollars and leaves Pete taking the bus home. Platinum P is an outsized character with a penchant for self-depreciation, and the turnaround-- he doesn't hate women, 'cause a woman wins in the end, sorta-- is maybe fair play. But the track's still a rough dose to swallow. Listen to the wink-and-nod, not the Casio flute and motherboard bass, and have faith that a bitch out buying apparel while you're playing gin rummy is somehow funnier, or more moral, than Washingtons-for-wifey while you're sparking Phillies. Inner-borough pranks outer-borough by lowering already sordid females-n-dick-jokes stakes; downtown pranks uptown for being less broke but talking about it way more; fake rappers prank real rappers by turning the gun on themselves and begging for bus money. Is there a less appetizing fantasy involving something over two feet long?

MP3: Platinum Pete: Just a Ho
Posted by Zach Baron in gallery rap on Wed: 09-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jamelia
“Beware of the Dog”
[2006]
★★
Rihanna's "S.O.S." was a decent enough idea with its roughed up Soft Cell riff, but there's certainly no need to make this a trend. Long-time UK soul dove Jamelia barely fiddles with the formula for her "Beware of the Dog", substituting Depeche Mode's "Personal Jesus" pon de riff and changing the tone from "hot for you" to "don't get burned". Same Beyoncé-ish vocals, same Beyoncé-ish quote-unquote emotion. The difference being that a song about hooking up doesn't need to be convincing, whereas one about the douchebaggery of men should sound a lot angrier than this. But again, we're living in B's World now, where people think "Ring the Alarm" is scary and "Deja Vu" is sexy, so maybe "Beware" is as fierce as we can expect.
Posted by Peter Macia in pop on Tue: 09-19-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Teleseen
“Xion Gate”
[2006]
★★★½

Teleseen's an electronic M.C. Escher, using unreliable perspectives and impossible angles to tessellate a sonic space. His austere grids of minimal techno and abstract dub usually opt for the academic over the visceral, but in contrast to the pulsating, unevenly stelliform shapes he often charts, "Xion Gate" telescopes out with clean, conical elegance. It begins at the tapered end as breathy house synths, truncated and beveled, stir amid bead-curtain percussion, then widens out with the introduction of a muffled kick, a high tremulous smear, and recessed flecks of dubby echo. From here on out, it's just a matter of shifting emphases: Click tracks ramify, synths coruscate like a fiber-optic filament wave. By the time the track decays into an angelic shrill-out, it's as broadly

resonant as sound pooling in the bell of a horn, with the same unfathomable yet indivisible relationship to its tiny aperture of origin.

Stream: Teleseen: Xion Gate
Posted by Brian Howe in electronic on Tue: 09-19-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jim O'Rourke
“6 Oscillators '87”
[2006]
★★★★½

A friend puts it in the most complimentary of ways: “Fuck Jim O’Rourke.” During the past 20 years, the soft-spoken O’Rourke has rifled through every fringe he could find and managed to make innumerable contributions to experimental music: He is or has been half of Gastr del Sol, a Derek Bailey collaborator, a minimalist composer, a laptop guru, a stunning songwriter, a Loren Connors digital transfer expert, a Wilco producer, a Sonic Youth member and the person partially responsible for the release of the only Dream Syndicate material commercially available. And now this? C’mon.

O’Rourke recorded this six-oscillator side of noise in 1987, when he was an 18-year-old at DePaul. Tones are penetrating but careful, microtonal spurns clipping and crawling and slinking alongside one another, pings, loops and shards of white bouncing upward from a matrix of metal spheres grinding in glacial motion, sparks popping all white and red and yellow. It shows the compositional patience and real-time thought that relative neophytes like Wolf Eyes are just now understanding. They bit first on ultra-anglo hooks like shock value, but not O’Rourke. Instead, over 23 minutes of proto-American harsh noise, O’Rourke wades through complex themes with protracted patience. Yep, 18 years before your "new" noise idea.

Posted by Grayson Currin in noise on Tue: 09-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Benni Hemm Hemm
“I Can Love You In A Wheelchair Baby”
[2006]
★★★

On first listen it's the kindest statement of devotion: "I can love you in a wheelchair, baby/ I can love you any way you want." Listen to the next two lines though: "I can love you anywhere you want me to/ I can do it anytime." Iceland's Benni Hemm Hemm-- fronted by Benedikt H. Hermannsson-- isn't professing so much as flossing (not Flössin). This is active, vigorous love here, not platonic platitude. Take out your Nerve daily positions deck and count the sitting positions-- at least some of them must use a chair, rocking or stationary. Benni can do it, he says, "anytime." How do we know? For starters, he deadpans these four lines continuously over the songs acoustic strum and mid tempo beat. He is serious. How do we *really* know? Hermannsson's slack-jawed "ohhhh"s on the chorus glide so lazily he could have been checking his fingernails for dirt while singing it. A well-placed horn line is the only thing that separates the chorus from the verse, but Hermannsson couldn't be bothered to make them any more different. He's just too laid back, too confident. I mean, he takes his sex sitting down.

MP3: Benni Hemm Hemm: I Can Love You In A Wheelchair Baby
Posted by Jessica Suarez in folk on Tue: 09-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lee Ann Womack
“Finding My Way Back Home”
[2006]
★★★½

Like Toby Keith, Lee Ann Womack caught flack for a song ("I Hope You Dance") that was more popular than it should have been, though it was hardly her best or even her usual fare. Last year's solid *There's More Where That*

Came From proved she could sell substantial songs about lust, infidelity, regret, sin, and stubbornness, suggesting that a single called "Finding My Way Back Home" would be a defiant post-hook-up walk of shame. No such luck. At first blush it sounds like calculated uplift, from the "Higher Love" percussion groove to its sappy lyrics about hard-won self-possession. But damned if the song doesn't reveal new depths beyond that initial impression, toying with the typical country-music highway metaphor as it eyeballs the possibilities that lie ahead, not the miseries behind. And damned if Womack doesn't sing the hell out of it, hitting that long note in the chorus with unflinching gusto. "I've been goin' too fast, I got off of the gas/ I've been learning the charm of the brake," she explains, shedding her last worry and enjoying the bumpy ride.

Stream: Lee Ann Womack: Finding My Way Back Home
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Tue: 09-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Scissor Sisters
"Lights"
[2006]
★★★★

The secret hero of "Stayin' Alive" was its swinging-balls bass line, the one that propped up the rest of the song whenever the bros stopped harmonizing and (one imagines) just stood there dancing. So forgive the Scissor Sisters for raiding the Gibb attic, borrowing the line's hiccuping momentum, then hiding it under some guitar fuzz and horn stabs, because the thing works like ostrich feathers on a Swarovski-studded silver-chiffon cape. It's enough to distract you from the song's lyrics-- which is not to say they're bad, because I'm pretty sure the song is some kind of profound meditation on loss or whatever-- in the sense that when Jake Shears' falsetto mixes with the aforementioned brass-bass cocktail, all you really hear him saying is "Dance". Scissors + Horns = Everything good.

Stream: Scissor Sisters: Ta-Dah LP
Posted by Rob Dubbin in disco on Mon: 09-18-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Hinder
"Lips of an Angel"
[2006]
½

Sensitive Macho Dude (cheers when LT takes down Joe Theismann for the umpteenth time; laughs at Bud Light commercials) takes time away from his current fling du jour to field a call from his one twue wuv, and gets choked up by how she says his name. That's where the angel lips come in, by the way-- shame on you if you thought Mr. Hinder was hitting below his belt. Unfortunately, SMD talks to his angel (and treats his current chick) like he was raised on a diet of The Heights and Nickelback. That this sort of nail-gargling seems to strike a chord with the folks reminiscing about that sophomore year lap dance to Pearl Jam's "Black" speaks to the public's boggling tolerance for sappy emoting of all colors and Creeds. Consider this fourth-gen grunge stinker Fuzztone For The Painfully Stallone, and just throw in the towel.

Stream: Hinder: Lips of an Angel
Posted by David Raposa in grunge on Mon: 09-18-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Who
"Tea & Theatre"
[2006]
★★★½

Twenty-four years since their last studio album, with the bar set who knows how high, at the very least Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend have picked up the art of the internet leak: "Tea & Theatre" is one of two tracks making the rounds before the full-length appears the last day of October. The song ends the album as this sorta maudlin retrospective, a barely appropriate move for comeback rocker types let alone anyone else. Yet it works. Without permanently surrendering the windmill chords, mic-swinging, and guitar-smashing classic rock persona the Who created for themselves, the song goes on about the band's history of making history-- it's actually pretty

objective, considering. And sometimes it's even poignant, as in the finale: "The story is done/ It's getting colder now," Daltrey laments. "A thousand songs/ Still smolder now/ We played them as one/ We're older now."

Stream: The Who: Tea & Theatre
Posted by Andy Dubbin in rock on Mon: 09-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Klaxons
“Gravity's Rainbow”
[2006]
★★★

Klaxons' pretense is far more interesting than they're letting on with "Gravity's Rainbow", their first U.S. single after a run of UK hype. Repping for KLF (who repped for Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson [who repped for Thomas Pynchon]), these Burroughs-named Londoners rocketed to relative fame via *NME*'s specious tag as the "new rave." If you try, you might hear the pace and rhythm of the Prodigy's "One Love", but mostly the song's just hypertensive Bloc Party with forlorn lyrics giving this modern love a half-life of infinity. Drums hurtle, guitars thrust, voices soar, etc. Something about a "Madcap Medusa" and a "rubix groom hoom" too. Not a bad plan to drop New Order in favor of retro-futurism, I'm just not sure it needs its own genre just yet.

Stream: Klaxons: Gravity's Rainbow
Posted by Peter Macia in dance rock on Mon: 09-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Platinum Weird
“Avalanche”
[2006]
★★★
Kara DioGuardi and Dave Stewart have perpetrated what must be the least convincing hoax of the year: Platinum Weird is supposedly Stewart's reformed "lost classic rock band" whose flighty, fictional lead singer Erin Grace has been replaced by DioGuardi herself. Along with John Shanks, the album's producer, DioGuardi has co-written most of Ashlee Simpson and Lindsay Lohan's best material. So it makes sense that this sounds like a decent facsimile of Ashlee/Lindsay-rock, similarly indebted to the revamped 1990s alt-rock mold still in vogue in modern teenpop. But this song is missing its center: Dioguardi has a powerful voice, but it lacks the sharpness of Lindsay's phrasing or the force of Ashlee's personality. There's no sense of humor and there are no real

surprises, even if the song itself is as catchy and well-constructed as any other quality Shanks/DioGuardi track. The so-called puppetmasters flounder a bit without their puppets.
Posted by David Moore in pop on Mon: 09-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Meat Loaf
“It's All Coming Back to Me Now [ft. Marion Raven]”
[2006]
★½

Almost thirty years after the Meat and composer-lyricist Jim Steinman nailed their camped-up take on Springsteen, the ribald eccentricities and witty metaphors that made *Bat Out of Hell* such a strong saga are gone. All that's left is rote sentimentalism coupled with all the stale repetition this song's title suggests. You may remember the bawling ballad as a No. 2 hit for Celine Dion from 1996. No? Well, maybe the two videos-- both featuring dripping candles, a fatal crash and haunting mirrors galore-- will jog the brain. The visual "tributes" don't end there. Meat's clip offers lame nods to *Eyes Wide Shut* and his last major MTV hit, the Michael Bay-directed gothic shlockfest "I Would Do Anything For Love (But I Won't Do That)". As a new generation of guitar bands seems hell bent on topping the ostentatious sound Meat Loaf helped pioneer, all he can do is regurgitate past smashes with a straight face.

Stream: Meat Loaf: It's All Coming Back to Me Now [ft. Marion Raven]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in rock on Fri: 09-15-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Justus Köhncke
“Advance”
B-Side: Justus Köhncke
“Overhead”
[2006]
★★★★
Typically Germany's most cheerful house producer, Justus Köhncke proves on "Advance" that he can do voguish abstacted moodiness with as much aplomb as any: Stiff live drums refract dubbed-out sparkles, and an eerie piano takes four minutes to unfurl into a gleaming Detroit techno breakdown. The effect is dreamlike rather than dreamy, sliding fluidly between motifs with a disorienting internal logic that is hidden from the listener, with only a patient snare drum to guide. To compensate, "Overhead" is a storming we-used-to-call-it-French-House number based around a spine-tingling sample from the 90s version of the Four Seasons' "Oh What a Night". But where most of Köhncke's disco homages dole out their revivalist joys in measured but generous doses, here he plays with his audience in a manner that verges on manipulative, holding the marvelous disco shiver so close you can sniff its sweat, then obscuring it behind stutters and EQ phasing, so carefully denying final gratification that you're left feeling deliciously exploited.
Posted by Tim Finney in house on Fri: 09-15-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Diddy
“The Future”
[2006]
★★★

Much has been made of Diddy's willingness to acknowledge his use of ghostwriters. His "don't worry if I write rhymes, I write checks" line from 2001's "Bad Boy for Life" now sounds like an indelible mogul mantra. But he's never lifted flow from any of his writers before, be they rumored titanic collaborators like Jay-Z or professionally unfamous scribes like Skillz. Until "The Future", a grim industrial strand of lockstep laced with political paranoia, penned by Pharoahe Monch. Though Monch has been out the spotlight for years (read: Please Come Back), he's embodied terrifyingly well by his new mouthpiece. Diddy lacks the sing-songy lilt that made Monch an operatic hollerer, but he's got the rigid delivery down. When the beat drops out halfway through and he declares, "This is the man who provided more jobs for blacks than Armed Services," it may be hyperbole, but

the lack of winking smarm feels earned. Even if it's artifice, he's breaking ground on artistic pretensions. Diddy can be anyone he wants to be, no matter the price or voice. He's malleable, disposable-- the new new old shit.

MP3: Diddy: The Future
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Fri: 09-15-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Diddy
"Press Play Intro"
[2006]
★★★

Dogging Diddy for his checks-4-rhymes rap pyramid scheme is like yelling "faker!" at a lonelygirl15 convention, i.e. it's more than foolish. The whole history of "ghostwriting" used to be cloaked in mystery and intrigue not unlike TV's *Ghostwriter* (Sheldon Turnipseed, where art thou?). And then there was Diddy, who mutated the practice into a Phil Hartman-caliber impersonation-tribute. "I got a brand new flow, man," he starts, and any stylistic resemblance between this "new" flow and the "old" flow of a certain person living and not-actually-retired is hardly coincidental. Over "Encore" fanfare, Diddy wittingly (?) does promo duty for his script man: "New York feel it in their gut/ If Jay coming back then the world needs Puff." And Diddy does his little internet piss routine, bringing the mumbling-imp flamboyance to the fore. "I recognize niggas that copy my style," he claims, "But never been a been a nigga this fly, holdin' it down for this long." What more can he say?

Stream: Diddy: Press Play Intro
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Fri: 09-15-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Diddy
"Get Off"
[2006]
★½
Here's a weird one. Beyond the Biggie corpse-humping and the Yung Joc co-signing and the awkward dancing and the egomania, everyone's big criticism of Diddy is that he can't rap and never could. So here he responds to the criticism by ditching rap altogether. He's still yelling stuff on top of a beat, but he's not rhyming, not making any attempt to string two words together: "Where I'm from, you know, we like to dance in the summertime outside on the street corners. In Harlem, we call it gettin' off." He wants us to think James Brown, even name-drops the man. Really, he's more DJ Kool or Fatman Scoop. And he's not even that; Diddy doesn't have those guys' megaton blurt, and his self-hyping yell is a little too thin and strangulated for "Get Off" to become a drill team staple. The beat's not doing him too many favors either; it's not one of those unstoppable, monstrous "Let Me Clear My Throat" stompers. It's prim and contained, just a minimal breakbeat with a few piano flutters and sax honks. Still, this odd song's a ballsy move. It's Diddy's first real grab at unapologetic old-school showmanship; it's a failure, but a noble one.
Stream: Diddy: Get Off
Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Fri: 09-15-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jibbs
"Chain Hang Low"
[2006]
★
Let it be known that St. Louis sensation Jibbs got his shot by spitting raw freestyles at the age of 8. Of course, those freestyles were heard by his brother who was producing for Nelly and the St. Lunatics at the time, so grab a handful of salt. One junior high graduation later and teen Jibbs foists this brainy gem on the masses, a sorta-snap song that relies on a kid-sung chorus jacked from ice cream truck anthem "Do Your Ears Hang Low?" Public response is purely Pavlovian; I've seen grown men running after Jibbs promo vans playing "Chain Hang Low" at high volume. Still, it only takes a second to catch up, and the popsicles are sugar-free.
Stream: Jibbs: Chain Hang Low

Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Thu: 09-14-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Two Ton Boa
“Cash Machine”
[2006]
★★★½
Sherry Fraser (aka Two Ton Boa) drops this mid-tempo monster with a lot of bravado, attempting to rekindle the rawk from one of its more tiresome launching pads, the Pacific Northwest. Her first material in seven years, "Cash Machine" relies on a bass-centric approach and grouchy countenance, fucking around the periphery of canonical grunge without touching the epicenter, much like the Jesus Lizard or the Breeders. However, while Fraser's bass-riffs huff and puff, Dudley never comes and the *Last Splash* is more of a ripple by the final chorus. Fraser's got a hankerin' for a tour de force refrain but comes out firing blanks-- a shame too considering how 10% of this song tarnishes the solid and smart remainder. The bad apple effect's absolutely infuriating, and Fraser's forcedly climactic howls (which veer into Evanescence territory, no joke) nearly botch a noise stomper that's otherwise simultaneously ahead of and before its time.
MP3: Two Ton Boa: Cash Machine
Posted by Adam Moerder in rock on Thu: 09-14-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Saigon
“Pain in My Life [ft. Trey Songz]”
[2006]
★★

Patience is wearing thin with Saigon. Heralded "smart MC that will also beat your ass" more times than we'd like to recount, the former "Entourage" star's first street single from the forever forthcoming *The Greatest Story Never Told* is a turgid series of stories. The whole point of a street single is to get an artist's audience gassed with something raw but catchy-- accessible enough that heads will learn all the words, but just roughneck enough that it'd never work in the major market. "Pain in My Life" is one of the softest records Saigon has ever recorded. Whatever sadness he's trying to convey here is washed out by Trey Songz's soggy semantics; he gets to moan and amble during the chorus, bridge *and* extended outro. Sai's sharp, methodical phrasing is intact, but his subject matter is neither universal nor affecting, despite his intentions.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Thu: 09-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Eliot Lipp
“Tic Tac (John Hughes Remix)”
[2006]
★★★½

Eliot Lipp's "Tic Tac", which rides a single stuttering keyboard phrase, deserves its name: It's plenty fresh, but you only get one flavor in the box. Slicker's John Hughes rethinks Lipp's relentless thrust as a concise chorus, slotting it neatly between complementary slabs of spacious space-funk. Where people like DJ Shadow are hardcore theorists of instrumental hip-hop, Lipp's like a popular science writer, with his layperson-friendly combination of boilerplate breaks and sharp-edged melodic mirages. Hughes honors this directness while broadening "Tic Tac"'s palette with moist *ATLiens* FX, ice-cold chimes neatly sectioning off measures, a dynamically elastic bass melody, exclamatory vocal snippets and far-off sirens. For symmetry, this should've been called "Skittles".

Posted by Brian Howe in hip hop on Thu: 09-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Kevin Federline
“Lose Control”
[2006]
★★½

Teen Choice Awards 2006: It's like the point in some ridiculous movie where the Big Event, the one that promises to blow the whole thing over the top, turns out to be a lame anticlimax. But there's a double lameness: It's also lame because everyone at the Event is pretending that it isn't lame. When K-Fed debuted his solo career to close out the evening, he achieved a profound triple lameness, because I was lame, too, for getting so excited anyway-- precisely because it was so lame. It was a grand, embarrassing spectacle, with kid sidekicks and arbitrary upstaging breakdancers and preggers Britney at the podium. It was the kind of lame that's got "that hip-hop flavor mixed with a little bit of rock 'n'roll." There's not much rock 'n'roll to speak of, actually-- more like snap meets "The Final Countdown" with a grating piano hook shoehorned in. It was fill-in-the-rhyme game lame: "Let me take you back to five o'clock/ When I drove the Lamborghini off the ____." It was the kind of lame that made you feel like you were part of something special.

Posted by David Moore in pop on Thu: 09-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Escort
“Starlight”
[2006]
★★★★½
The nine-piece Escort belong to a special sect of mirrorball worship. Unlike Lindstrøm's "Moroder & Dorfmeister" cocktail, the muted tones of Environ's stable, or even Belle and Sebastian's epic pastiche, Escort fully and earnestly throw disco back, halfway between the Garage and Philly International. That means "Starlight", its sopranos gliding miles above an obsessive rhythm section and discount strings-- romance versus science on the cheap. And from its nonstop bongo patter to the battery of violin stabs-- played against a curling, phosphorescing synth line-- the groove bizarrely feels more organic than its forebears. Two divas, locked in a contest of pathos, swap elongated coos ("Staaaaar-light") and lovelorn chestnuts ("I can't stop thinking of you"). It's the emotional distance that makes the genre so mysteriously bittersweet, and the song so much more than polyester pageantry.
Posted by Roque Strew in disco on Wed: 09-13-06: 11:20 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Killers
“When You Were Young (Jacques Lu Cont's Thin White Duke Radio Edit)”
[2006]
★★★★
If the man of a thousand mixes erroneously excised the Duran Duran from his first dalliance with the Killers (**as our own Amy Phillips purported**), consider this restitution. M. Lu Cont, in saving the Killers from their delusions of small-town grandeur, disregards the group's attempt to give The Boss a half-ass Patrick Nagel makeover. In place of the sub-Spector drums and out-of-place E Street fanfare are the synthetic swoops and swoons that gave Brandon Flowers Inc. the leeway to shoot themselves in the ass. If it sounds like a great *Hot Fuss* B-side, so much the better: Flowers's current brand of pretentious poesy sounds much better when draped in pastels and excessive eyeshadow. To hell with Thunder Road, dudes-- stick to the Metro.
Posted by David Raposa in dance on Wed: 09-13-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ludacris
“Money Maker [ft. Pharrell]”
[2006]
★★★
Atlanta really did need another strip-club anthem. So Ludacris and Pharrell deliver "Money Maker", roasting a Nellyesque sing-rap over steamy tropical percussion, a relentless knock that re-imagines "Can I Get a..." played with pots and pans. Fleshed out with deep, one-two bass punches and organs that trickle before bursting, it sounds faintly sinister. The hook boasts a lowering blend of Eros and economics: Luda's soliciting followed by Skateboard's stage-whispered counsel to "shake your moneymaker/ Like somebody 'bout to pay ya." By cutting no-nonsense tracks like "War With God", new Luda promised a new seriousness. The old Luda, after all, was something of a bawdy, nonsense-hawking jester. In the wake of his "Flowbee incident" though, it's clear he hasn't completely given up his old habits. To wit: "Let me give you swimming lessons on the penis."

Posted by Roque Strew in hip hop on Wed: 09-13-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Panic! At the Disco
“I Write Sins, Not Tragedies”
[2006]
★
The only difference between misogyny in run-of-the-mill rock songs, misogyny in hip-hop, and misogyny in run-of-the-mill emo songs is how far the singer's balls have dropped. All of it, however, is selling like hotcakes, and Panic's rise from Fall Out Boy's pet project to platinum-polishing boy toys is proof of that. They can swathe their broken hearts in pre-pubescent warbling and polysyllabic pretensions all they want. It won't change the fact that this woe-is-me story of a groom learning some dirt about his bride right before the wedding is just another stupid song about a dude getting screwed over by a girl performed by dudes that don't sound like they've ever screwed in a lightbulb, on an album full of the stuff. These kids should take their own advice: Face this sort of nonsense with a little poise and rationale, and leave the woman-hating for the booth-tanned grunge fucks.
Posted by David Raposa in rock on Wed: 09-13-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

SebastiAn
“Ross Ross Ross”
[2006]
★★★★
While it may not be the tone-poem for slovenly crack dealers that I'd hoped it was, "Ross Ross Ross" definitely has some leftover chunks of a symphony stuck in its grill, and for roughly three minutes SebastiAn flosses them with clipped guitar riffs and jabbing bass hits. But just like a slab of clove jammed in a hot date's teeth can put you at ease, the sweeping disco strings on "Ross" add that little bit of vulnerability lacking in some of the more hyped Ed Banger records. Minus those strings, this is just a scatterbrained heavy electro track with clever programming and restless beat changes, but the strings cut through the frenzy with sharp analog swipes, pulling the song in and out of some cheesy disco past that most would think to avoid. Think of it as a young John Travolta, dressed in white, dancing with a rough Gerard Depardieu as Christopher Columbus, only less fucking hot.
Stream: SebastiAn: Ross Ross Ross
Posted by Peter Macia in dance rock on Tue: 09-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Nadiya
“Tous Ces Mouts (SebastiAn Remix)”
[2006]
★★★★
Sit in a dingy shoebox hotel room in Hanoi and the original "Tous Ces Mouts" will sound like the greatest pop song in the world. It's a mid-tempo rip-off of 50's "In Da Club" with a singer who looks like the Photoshop project of a *Rides* subscriber. Remove it from the city-wide din of "Take Me Home Country Road", though, and it's just above-average Europop with a shitty rap cameo (huge in France, apparently). The song's saving grace is an endorphin blast of a hook, and that's all SebastiAn takes for this remix. The breaths between the multi-tracked keytar riffs, cavernous claps, and Nadiya's throaty wail are squeezed and chopped to effect-- which appears to be a hookup between remixer and remixee, as Seb Lover edits Nadiya's vocals so she begs "Call me, SebastiAn"-- transforming the track from something about the power of words to the sonic equivalent of pasting yourself next to the hot chick in all her yearbook photos.
Posted by Peter Macia on Tue: 09-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Vegastar
“Elle Blesse (Para One Remix)”
[2006]
★★★½
Have no doubt that Para One has a great sense of humor, for he fucks this song up properly. Vegastar, for those fortunate enough not to know, is the worst rock band ever, but in France, they are mentioned in the same bated breath as woman-panters My Chemical Romance and Panic! at the Disco. You want to know what "Elle Blesse" means? "She Injures." Para One takes "her" cue and pummels the Vega boys into acid-glitched house hysterics

for nearly two minutes before yanking them up by the armpits, dusting the shame off their tiny t-shirts and dropping ecstacy in their drinks. What ensues for the final two minutes is what Cobrasnake pics are made of: sweaty, blacked-out pogoing with boy-girls and girl-women wearing so many fucking pink bandanas you think you've died and gone to grit Valhalla.
Posted by Peter Macia in dance rock on Tue: 09-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Mr. Oizo
“Nazis (Justice Remix)”
[2006]
★★★½
This is like that time you first took your dad in something-- checkers, wrestling, drinking, whatever. Mr. Oizo hit #1 seven years ago with an ugly bit of squelch called "Flat Beat" that no doubt made its way to the ears of the boys in Justice, whose own brand of brain-damaged electro is currently lighting hipster hearts aflame. I'm sure you can guess that Oizo's "Nazis" was no flower in the gunbarrel, but the remix takes what was a grating glitch-to-my-loo and makes it sound like you're being ground between the teeth of a party monster. Even more than their "Waters of Nazareth", Justice's remix is as close as I've heard to whatever dance-punk is supposed to be. Technically, you could do dance-type things to it-– pump your hips, wave your hands over your head–- but the decayed-to-tatters synth and disorienting drum hits are much better suited to clobbering some doofus with a shoulder charge and pouring beer over your head. I guess this is what happens to kids who listen to Air growing up.
Posted by Peter Macia in dance rock on Tue: 09-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Das Glow
“Weiss Gaz”
[2006]
★★½
If the new hipster club music is all about jacking other people's shit, Das Glow is Napoleon. As far as I can tell, this is snap ghettotech B'more acid Miami house by a French kid with a German fetish, but that's probably so off the mark that I'm pissing my Depends in terms of knowing what's cool. Even so, it does have bits of all those things without coming off like Girl Talk gone wild, and when the track moves from dropping marbles down your ear canals to swabbing them with stun darts, it's a pretty fun experience considering the discomfort. Don't expect much melody-– actually, don't expect any melody. "Weiss Gaz" carries a tune like a dial-up modem. But if you're looking for something to put on that ripster mix between the Spankrock remix and "Do It To It", this probably wouldn't be a bad look.
Stream: Das Glow: Weiss Gaz
Posted by Peter Macia in dance rock on Tue: 09-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

My Chemical Romance
“Welcome to the Black Parade”
[2006]
★★★

The messiah-superstar ambition of these five New Jersey punks rightly elevated them above their whining three-chord Warped Tour contemporaries last year. Emboldened by the mandate from emo-nation, now they're supersizing-- Andrew Lloyd Webber style. "I always wanted to be in musicals," said head Romancer Gerard Way in a recent interview. As his bandmates nervously laughed at his not-so-hardcore candor, Way stood steadfast, later declaring his love for *A Chorus Line* and repping Liza Minnelli, who guests on MCR's new album. The guy is not kidding.

To wit, this blaring new track pulls the curtain all the way back on the band's flashy night at the opera, where Brian May's pomp-adore meets Ziggy's eyeliner and GN'R's grand illusions in a spectacle of crashing chandelier proportions. Yet, if Jay Leno's head has taught us anything, hugeness has a tendency to get in the way. Whereas previous career high "I'm Not Okay (I Promise)" was a sneering pop-punk rave-up with flickers of high wire Queen-age, "Welcome to the Black Parade" flips that equation, and its segues and overdone "we'll carry on" fist-

pumps come off somewhat forced. "I'm just a man, I'm not a hero," sings Way; though the overflow of ideas within these five minutes is staggering in scope, the song's clunky cohesion tugs it earthward.

Stream: My Chemical Romance: Welcome to the Black Parade
Posted by Ryan Dombal in rock on Mon: 09-11-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Beach House
“Tokyo Witch”
[2006]
★★★★
For those of you who missed out on Broadcast last year, here's the 2006 U.S. model, an electronica duo from Baltimore that writes sunny pop songs before frosting the tips. No surprise then that "Witch" qualifies as the quintessential post-summer/pre-autumn theme. Frontwoman Victoria Legrand conjures Mazzy Star covering the Zombies at their trippiest, though the rub's in the instrumentation: Lurking 8-bit synthlines suggest the spookier moments of *Zelda* or *Castlevania* yet simultaneously romanticize the adventure. If witches and necromancy aren't your bag (and believe me, they're my bag), check out the song's latter half, thawed out by a tender reverb guitar that quells the D&D vibes. While not exactly game for ice cream and Hacky Sack, this Beach House at least knows how to entertain on a rainy day.
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie pop on Mon: 09-11-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Streets
“Pranging Out (Remix) [ft. Pete Doherty]”
[2006]
★★★½

He's supposedly the last rock star, Doherty. But if that was true, the one-time poet prodigy and Oxford dropout's eternal smacked-in limbo should be vicarious theater at its most reckless, a carefree audience spectacle that hides railed veins in favor of goofy suits and *NME* quotes of the week. Doherty's addiction isn't a *Scarface* high though, it's a *Trainspotting* crash bubbling with fear and loathing. The man's tragic, fascinating spoken-word ramblings on this remix make Mike Skinner's original junkie paranoia riffs seem like a trip to the Enchanted Tiki Room.

However hard he's feeling the convoluted pangs of prang, Doherty stays self-aware ("all this babbling is my attempt at verse"), poignant ("get it together to sing as I once sang, drinking with the old gang"), and pithily stark ("my injustice jailed and through a tabloid crossword nailed"). Let's see you slur such insight while sliding off a five-day bender. When he claims to be as "sad as sin on a pirate ship on dry land," the image resonates with trapped torment; for an artist famous for being lost in the throes, any type of escape is to risk losing the muse.

Stream: The Streets: Pranging Out (Remix) [ft. Pete Doherty]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in pop on Mon: 09-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cat Power
“Who Knows Where The Time Goes”
[2006]
★★★
Next to Fairport Convention, who had their own version of this track, Chan Marshall sounds less like she's recasting the original in her image and more like she just doesn't know the song. She eschews Denny's wistful and content ruminations on the order of things, instead focusing on the line about fickle friends and turning the song's titular question into a portentous moan. Thankfully, Marshall's piano counteracts this slanted lyrical revision. The sound of the piano notes fading into silence carries more weight than any of Marshall's over-emotive whispers. Maybe Chan knows this song after all.
Posted by David Raposa in indie rock on Mon: 09-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jim Jones
“We Fly High”
[2006]
★★★

Many Dipset fans tag capo Jim Jones as the bête noire-- the unfavorite, the worst of the worst. Jones always ruins first-rate beats with cut-rate rhymes. On "We Fly High" it's no different. But to attack the lyrics is to miss the point. This isn't a diss track, a slice-of-life narrative, a posse cut, or a rap&b duet. Jones knows his limits. "We Fly High" is about going to the club, then leaving the club. No surprise it's tailored for the clubs, not earbuds, as handclaps and dot-matrix synths simmer under a decadent back-and-forth chorus: "We fly high/ No lie/ You know this." The verses dabble in Woody Allen-style wealth pornography, peppered with absurd interjections like "light change!" and "that Grey Poupon!" Then right on cue, above a flurry of sex sighs, Jones starts to slowly strangle his anthem with ad-libs. Good til then though.

Posted by Roque Strew in hip hop on Mon: 09-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Clark
“Herr Bar (Reinterpretation / Improvisation) [ft. Broadcast]”
[2006]
★★★

This Warpy two-step between the IDM underdog Clark and his precious synth friends Broadcast isn't a remix or a mash or a coked-out Steven Tyler smashing through the wall *what the?* With the online-only freebie, these two artists earn the "(Reinterpretation / Improvisation)" tag as the original's neat nano-snare snips, scattershot skitters, and streamlined sine flows become one disassociated blur. Clark's eerie dread is in there somewhere, but his diamond cuts are severely dulled-- something like Broadcast hearing "Herr Bar" semi-loud through a thin wall, waiting a few hours to kinda forget it, then jamming on the afterthoughts. What happens is a Broadcast track, double-spaced and voiceless, trembling with caution, stuck in-between. As internet filler, it's fit enough-- definitely "inspired by true events" rather than "based on a true story."

- Throttleclark.com: http://www.throttleclark.com
- **MP3: Clark**: Herr Bar (Reinterpretation / Improvisation) [ft. Broadcast]

Posted by Ryan Dombal in electronic on Fri: 09-08-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Raconteurs
“Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down) (live; Cher cover)”
[2006]
★

There's something to be said about Nancy Sinatra's version of this song. She transformed the daft Sonny/Cher number into a heavy ballad that let the chord changes emote and the steady poetry wring. She outdid the original. The same cannot be said about the "Bang Bang" cover that the Raconteurs have been carrying on their world tour. With overstated riffs and considerable distortion that mindlessly undermine the tone of the song, the song's fire-- the fire that Sinatra revealed-- is lost entirely. I'm not knocking the Raconteurs' overstated riffs style, which has its fine moments of considerable distortion, and I don't want to fight Jack White. But this song is already threadbare from decades of play and the *Kill Bill* soundtrack. The NS take, meanwhile, is still mysteriously untouchable, which you'd think White and Co. might respect, however big on themselves they are. Cry out "Bang Bang" as loud as you want, but you'll still sound like a local cover band.

Posted by Andy Dubbin in rock on Fri: 09-08-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

50 Cent
“London London [ft. Fergie]”
[2006]
★★★
Fergie's plastic farce "London Bridge" is a monument not only to Western cultural decline, but also to record-industry kleptocrats. Shameless, loveless theft stains the song, which rips from "Tipsy", strips the ragged, percussive sass of Gwen's "Hollaback Girl", even flips off Missy's syllable-stretching "On and On." Or was it Shawnna's flow that Fergie hijacked? Some even hear "Galang" yelling for help, trapped below the chorus. It's hard to keep track. This is to say nothing of the raw phonetic poison of the words "Fergie Ferg." Somewhere uptown, Marley Marl is weeping.

On "London London", 50 introduces heatpacking menace to the track, poking holes in all the half-hearted hedonism with implied threats, pelvic thrusts, and theatrical gunshots. Wielding its own melodies against it, he plays up the song's soullessness as foreboding smut. The expected POV reversal of the chorus bumps the song from R to NC-17. But Fergie botched her program of innuendo-peddling. To drive this fact home, 50 presses an unapologetic misogyny that willy-nilly parodies our anti-diva's heinous original, diving gleefully into the void of her gender-studies thought traps. He exposes her depravity by exaggerating it. And he finishes her off simply by keeping the first verse from "London Bridge," effectively sketching Fergie as the foil not only to 50's outsize persona, but to his art too.

Stream: 50 Cent: London London [ft. Fergie]

Posted by Roque Strew in hip hop on Fri: 09-08-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

OOIOO
“Uma”
[2006]
★★★★
OOIOO is the comeback to anyone who's yelled, "Aw, she's so adorable" at a Deerhoof show, or who's cooed at Gwen Stefani's Harajuku girls. Briefly: Yoshimi P-we, longtime drummer for the Boredoms, founded and leads OOIOO. "UMA", the album's first track and its most aggressive, is "Hollaback Girl"'s evil twin. Drums, if they're tribal, are sacrificial. Call-and-responses turn from cheerleader chants to war cries and the most wicked coach whistle breakdown since my last field hockey game ended in 10 red cards. There's a cascade of sound effects over the drums (and possibly John Zorn on duck calls/duck farts), but they're of little (audible) consequence. OOIOO's Touch & Go video for "UMA" consists of light reflecting off water ("taiga" translates to 'big river' in Japanese), but I wish they'd shot the epilogue to the "Hollaback" video: With the extras sent home and camera crew packed up, Gwen's posse let their hair out of their ponytails, skin Gwen, and cast lots to divide up her halter top collection. Adorable.

Posted by Jessica Suarez in noise on Fri: 09-08-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Brad Paisley
“The World”
[2006]
★★½

Paisley channels his inner Petty on this clumsy single, which is only slightly more endearing than his other single, the party-ready sing-along "Alcohol" (whose wittiest revelation was that alcohol = white people dancing). Ben Sesar's shuffling drumbeat gives this song a fast rock tempo while Paisley lays down *Full Moon Fever* riffs over an awkward chorus and a protracted outro. There's also some steel guitar and fiddle in there just so you know you're listening to Real Country Music. As musically modest as "The World" is, it almost gets by on Paisley's romantic realism: "To the world you may be just another girl," he testifies, "but to me, girl, you are the world." Too bad he calls her a dip in the second verse, and too bad the video sucks.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Fri: 09-08-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Delia Gonzalez and Gavin Russom
“Relevee (Carl Craig Remix)”
“Relevee (DFA Remix)”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★★★
B-Side: ★★★★½
If we play the "techno vs. house" parlor game, techno's at the mercy of Detroit-as-Arcadia purists, while house is warm and catholic and all-appropriating. Carl Craig's work on "Relevee", some of the kids have already whined, is Not Detroit Enough. Yet Craig's remix is transcendent, and trance-inducing nonetheless. His arpeggiated tour of the unconscious lingers anxiously on the original sequenced bleeps. He marinates the melody north of three minutes before the 808 shows up, and these bass kicks deliver what the Krauty, spacey source material always implied: boundless dancefloor potential. Before long, an open hi-hat and clap add color to the minimal palette, as Craig molds the sounds into different shapes on the fly, with digital congas and an Alice Coltrane piano-as-harp strums forthcoming.

Typically, the DFA have little interest in the source material here, keeping only a rearranged version of the melody. Then of course they outfit the beat with handclaps and congas plus, inevitably, disco drums. So right off the bat their version of "Relevee" radiates their signature physicality. A fresh thicket of keys and a pounding low-end give it body. Soon house territory is on the horizon as we hear the echoes of tender diva mumblings. More Chicago than Detroit. More emoting too then, the melancholy dropped by Delia and Gavin swept up and away by the DFA's whirlwind of exuberance. Wait for it though: That bleached-clean piano at the end flips the script and surprises even the duo's most jaded listeners. Both duos.

Posted by Roque Strew in dance on Thu: 09-07-06: 01:10 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Brooke Hogan
“About Us [ft. Paul Wall]”
[2006]
★

Scott Storch runs the most egalitarian studio in town: Any celebrity-by-blood can buy his services. Brooke Hogan a/k/a Hulkamania, Jr. sprang for the slinky, halftone-ridden Middle Eastern package, which may or may not include a dalliance with Storchaveli himself. Going to bat for his client, Storch told *Rolling Stone* this June that Brooke's "not just a celebrity's daughter." But this production, like all his others, remains a vanity affair, top 40 hit *qua* exotic luxury item, not unlike space shuttle tourism. Call it a challenge: How much flavor can a producer whip up using utterly insipid ingredients? Paul Wall almost doesn't let us find out, cluttering the song with boilerplate like, "I hear the commentators on the side chatter boxin'/ Paul Wall and Brooke got all the

paparazzi watchin'." Hogan, meanwhile, uses her breakout single as a platform to kvetch about losing her privacy to reality TV: "How's a girl to breathe with all the media staring down my mouth/ With a four-inch lens, I just wanna hit the mall with some of my friends."

You already know Svengali-ism is a lousy, dishonest way of doing business, even when its product *is* worth listening to, because it tends to reinforce gender hierarchies. So how's this: This song's capital offense is not being terrible *enough*. The hook's a fluttery trifle, pitch-corrected to appease, and listenable out the wazoo. It's gainfully inoffensive, and that's worse than terrible.

Posted by Sam Ubl in pop on Thu: 09-07-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cassius
“Eye Water [ft. Pharrell]”
[2006]
★★★½

The gooey insides of Pharrell's turtle head may not be as fascinating as once imagined. The solo thing wasn't for him-- rainbow kerchiefs and carabiner chains make him pop out in videos, but he needs a muse. So after slumming with Air and Daft Punk, his gallic lust finally hits on the strength of this song's stupendously silly post-apocalyptic, inconveniently truthful premise. "They called it planet earth!" Pharrell cries. "Technology will teach you that its robots replace people," he reasons, then, as sincere as Keanu, "Look at your life now." There's beauty in the naiveté; Pharrell truly believes his hippie backwash will save the world today just as much as he truly believes he'll crib the fishnetted photo shoot model (no, the other one) while wearing the neon green (not hot pink) Ice Creams tomorrow. As the swirling electro stutters near the end-- as if the globe is grinding to a halt!-- the implicit warning is obvious: Let's stop the violence and pollution so Pharrell won't become the lone survivor of a nuclear holocaust without anybody to make music and have sex with.

Posted by Ryan Dombal in electro pop on Thu: 09-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Kaz Kyzah
“Cocaine”
[2006]
★★★½
I've decided to make Kaz Kyzah, of Bay Area outfit the Team, the de facto poet laureate of the Hipster Assholes Trap Rap Society. The dude *gets* us. Sometimes the bricktumbling internet gangster lifestyle gets us down, you see, and we just need to take some time off the download and reflect. "Slow pain, slow pain/ Got me like Cobain/ Insane in the brain," Kaz whispers like a hyphy Ben Gibbard, and it's like the diamonoids on our stunna shades are mirror images or something. The Nirvana reference isn't lost on us either. Kaz's verses tumble softly over 9th Wonder's lazy jazz guitar loop and shiftless brush snare in a clever formal contradiction to the usual ho-hum Tuesday afternoon feeling. Cocaine as a metaphor for the intoxication of love: Makes you want to blow a rail and write record reviews, don't it?
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Thu: 09-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The R.G. Morrison
“Learning About Loathing”
[2006]
★★★½

The three musicians in the R.G. Morrison-- who all go by their initials, including R.G. himself-- recorded this shamelessly mopey song in an old church in Cornwall, and the result is appropriately whispery and quote-unquote atmospheric. The song is so imperturbably quiet that it sounds like it could end midstrum. It takes puritan blisters and serious self-control to maintain this sort of melodic hush. Morrison the man starts the song with just his acoustic guitar and his voice, and the gradual introduction of J.R. Lamb's electric guitar and synths, followed by S.J. Grainger's roomy drums, doesn't increase the volume, just the intricacy of the layers.

Eventually-- slowly-- "Learning About Loathing" reaches a quietly climactic momentum as R.G. sings "I'm not a timecode" over and over and the song gently winds down, its big moment come and gone.

Stream: The R.G. Morrison: Learning About Loathing
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Thu: 09-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bonnie "Prince" Billy
“The Seedling”
[2006]
★★★★½
According to Daytrotter, Bonnie "Prince" Billy re-recorded this new album track in the studio on a stormy Sunday night. Given his haunting, plaintive delivery, I'd have assumed that's how he always works. Will Oldham established himself as a master of the ominous on his *I See a Darkness* album-- something about his vocals that sound more spoken than sung, his hair-raising moan almost too intense for words. On "The Seedling", he doesn't stray too far from that mood or form. Every note he sings is a painful struggle to extract, every guitar chord sounds half-heartedly pulled out, as if he's not yet ready to play, as if the Daytrotter folks forced him into the studio. You can hear the occasional out-of-place note here, a strained vocal delivery there, both flaws that actually contribute to the prevailing melancholy and a disquieting experience overall.
MP3: Bonnie Prince Billy: The Seedling (Daytrotter Session)
Posted by Justin Chun in indie on Wed: 09-06-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Polyphonic Spree
“Lithium (Nirvana Cover)”
[2006]
★★
As wtf as it seems, this cover makes perfect sense. Anyone who's ever seen the Texan twee cult in concert inevitably raves about how uplifting the experience was (e.g. "try the punch!"), and anyone who's had anything remotely bad happen to them can relate to Nirvana. Just combine these two life-changing forces and watch Natalie Portman's head explode. In practice though the reaction's endothermic. The only noteworthy addenda the Spree make are a kidz-bopped chorus and piano dressings reminiscent of Tori Amos's "Teen Spirit" cover. Funny how a song about bipolar disorder gets wrung through these rose-colored channels and takes on such an undeniably elated meaning. The choir sings "I'm not gonna crack," a Disney-esque swirl of woodwinds and horns guarantees a happy ending, and Cobain tries for suicide #2.
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie on Wed: 09-06-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Digitalism
“Jupiter Room (Martian Assault Edit)”
[2006]
★★★½
I gauge all tracks by headphone volume. If something's kicking my ass on three Powerbook bars, I write something in my notebook like "best song ever?" or "something is kicking my ass on three Powerbook bars." When two's all it takes, e.g. here, I clear my schedule and prepare for a long night. Perhaps from remixing so many rock guys, Digitalism figured out how to rock hard sans riffs. The result is this super-concentrated jernt. Sub-bass, hissing hats, bloopy synth runs are the lonely elements, all pushed to volumetric extreme. Afraid (not) to rock the *Maison*, Dig bypass a great opportunity to Escher-flip the beat by pulling out the highs and lows on the breakdown, which bummed me out at first. But I keep listening to this and "Zdarlight" next to each other, and their aspirations seem wholly different. The latter, Dig's euphoric house hit from last fall, soared to azure heights on a light-headed, melody-positive riff. This new effort hugs terra firma, threatening at many turns to open in a fissure.
Posted by Sam Ubl in house on Wed: 09-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Aaron LaCrate
“What You Know (Gutter Remix) [ft. T.I.]”
[2006]
★½

LaCrate's booty bounce is called Gutter. It's a cool word like Grime or Crunk. It sounds like something people would enjoy saying, e.g. "That shit is straight Gutter!" The word indicates something dirty, e.g. "Really need to clean those darn gutters." But Gutter doesn't fit this T.I. remix; LaCrate should've went with Slutter. Thanks to that recent Maureen Dowd *New York Times* column titled "What's Up, Slut?", we know the s-word has lost potency, just like how LaCrate's MySpace spin on Baltimore Club is too aware to truly tear. It's a *Fader* refraction of joyful though mindless reductionism, on par with pun-based mashups and Spank Rock: Unplugged. It's anti-meaning. And what we get here is T.I.'s "Chirp shawty/ Chirp back/ What you know about that?" again and again over that Lyn Collins break-- an indelicate one-sentence one-plus-one bad idea made gag song, as if LaCrate knew the two wouldn't mesh in the first place. Still, something tells me he might appreciate the Slutter tag. In the *Times* editorial, a college student says, "When I think of the word slut, I think of a woman who has been around the block more times than my dad's Chevy. I might date a slut, but I certainly wouldn't marry one." What's up, gut?

Posted by Ryan Dombal in slutter on Wed: 09-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Black Neon
"TX81z"
[2006]
★½

"TX81z" is a scientific pop song decrying the banalities of conformity by conforming mathematically. From the debut LP of Steve Webster aka the Black Neon, this track is the catchiest thing on the guy's album. Every 19 seconds, Webster shifts the song into its next serialization, another 19-second repetition with either different words or a different instrumental lead usurping its predecessor, stridently buying into some implicit motorik manifesto. What, is pop music's head supposed to explode? Ugh. At best some kids will take up the first two rounds' present tense verbs-- plasticate, annihilate, violate, masticate, automate, saturate and reverberate-- as elliptical battle cries, and they'll be eBaying for vintage Yamaha shirts by phrase five's close. Then they'll go listen to Orgy's *Candyass* and not tell a soul.

Stream: The Black Neon: TX81z

Posted by Grayson Currin in anti pop on Wed: 09-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Mya
"Ayo"
[2006]
★★★

Mya's divatude is subtle. She's a natural conversationalist, so when she veers into a near-ramble on a verse, it's more like a phone convo than a lecture. Her casual, blithe bird voice helps too, and she revels in her regular-chickness, which frees her from needing Beyonce-type hooks to get on. On "Ayo"'s P-Funkish bassy-ensemble business (with Fatman Scoop as her life coach), Mya's talky charm is full-flavor. After she airs out her ex-man for his flatness, she unfurls the chorus, which unfurls her in turn: newly single in the city, rolling through the club, less than enthralled with the busted-ass dudes she encounters there. But even with her tale-telling punctuated by whoops and whistles, it's a better concept than song: the choppy mid-tempo low-end is too lunkering for her airy tone and the whole ride ends up sorta idling on the median.

Stream: Mya: Ayo

Posted by Julianne Shepherd in r&b on Tue: 09-05-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tapes 'n Tapes
"Cowbell (The Black Eyes Remix)"
[2006]
★★½

OK, now the Wire comparisons make a little more sense. A once mad-paced acoustic number becomes more detached, economical electro, starting from scratch but keeping the structure. The original rhythm stays, but a few heavily-compressed chords replace the original's hokey strum. A horror-show keyboard hovers like a dentist's drill in the background, and a few terse octaves play hokey-pokey in the bridge-- all minimal additions made essential from the sparseness of the new arrangement. All that would save a better song, but "Cowbell" is by far my least favorite of TNT's, a high-energy go-nowhere jam with none of the inscrutable references or

patchwork charm of the rest of their debut. The remix is even more energy, and better ideas, headed to the same place.
Posted by Jason Crock in rock on Tue: 09-05-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lindstrom
“Pesto og Kolera (Brennan Green Saucey Version)”
[2006]
★★★★
Here Green recycles a few scraps of melody from Lindstrøm's cinematic, slow-burning "Pesto Og Kolera"-- smart nips and tucks that don't revamp the original, just punch it up and make it better. He rubberizes the scrawny bassline, sneaks in a darting guitar, then hangs a swank filigree of live keys. All the while a lonely shaker snakes through the whole affair. Common to both remixer and remixed, a cocktail of groove and grandeur provides the glue. Ornate prog flourishes cool down the smoldering dirty disco groundwork. Radiating electricity and lust, the remix completes the bridge between Studio 54 and the Eighteenth Street Lounge. Hard to believe Green started with Scandinavian blueprints.
Posted by Roque Strew in disco on Tue: 09-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Kaos
“Cerebral Tremolo (Brennan Green and Sal P. Edit)”
[2006]
★★★★
Prizing wobble over wallop, "Cerebral Tremolo"-- a track by Berlin-based DJ Kaos-- warps through space disco's wormhole, all the way to the smoky past of DFA's imagination. That means analog cowbell-and-synth nostalgia. Recast by Toronto transplant Brennan Green and Liquid Liquid's Sal Principato as a less capacious, zigzagging disco-not-disco affair, the new track squeezes a phalanx of tribal percussion and cop-show guitars into a crowded patch of punk-trampling funk. Chopping six of the original's 13 minutes, no time is wasted. Wave goodbye to texture; mean, clean efficiency is the name of the game here.
Posted by Roque Strew in disco on Tue: 09-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Brennan Green
“Little Ease (Lindstrom and Prins Thomas Remix)”
[2006]
★★★★

Here Green trades places with the Nordic track stars, i.e. Lindstrøm and Prins Thomas. Lindstrøm, recall, transformed LCD Soundsystem's fantastic-on-its-own "Tribulations" into cathartic dancefloor gold, the remixed builds longer and the payoffs bigger. The duo work a different approach on Green's track, mostly because the track's speed forces them out of boilerplate space-disco detailing: "Little Ease" is more like quixotic downtempo than quicksilver daydream, hardly what you'd expect from hearing Green's propulsive disco remixes. So L&PT match flutes to a sturdy new bass line and glowing strings, and the result could soundtrack a late 70s drug-bust montage. Not a bad thing. The song is, after all, a calm document of multiculti import-export. Moments of Balearic flair-- by way of Norway-- swell to epic proportions as every last, footloose groove locks meticulously into place.

Posted by Roque Strew in disco on Tue: 09-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Justin Timberlake
“What Goes Around.../...Comes Around Interlude”
[2006]
★★★½

First of all, yes, "Cry Me A River" 2006, that's obvious. But though I am as five-starry-eyed about "My Love" as the next man, I worry (seriously) that on the night my own personal Cameron Diaz gives up on me, "My Love" will feel like gloating, the possessive Mr. Timberlake's and no longer mine. So there's something more

dependable to "What Goes Around": the train ride home when you're bummed as all fuck, symph-dips that once sounded about as appetizing as an *In Her Shoes* matinee but now feel a whole lot realer, a kid about your age asking "Is this how we say goodbye?" It's a long way to such an awful spot-- and afterwards, only a few hours when a pop star might actually break through to save us. "What Goes Around" goes on for *seven full minutes*-- some real can't-let-go shit that'll save you the repeat stabs on the bad night.

Posted by Zach Baron in r&b on Fri: 09-01-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Rapture
"The Devil"
[2006]
★★★★

S'high time this apocalyptically-named band stopped leaving Satan behind. But wait, these lyrics don't mean boner. Reckon s'also high time Luke Jenner stopped bothering with the you've-got-to-be-shittingly 100% cliché lyrics. (He begins by rhyming "falling in love" with "heaven above," and the song builds to "let yourself go/ just lose all control," and those aren't even the worst couplets.) Forgive this paranoid reading, but the Rapture may very well be trying to prove a point about the centrality of the groove over verbiage, at the risk of sounding like karaoke performed over Out Hud. (The devil = boogie man, get it?) Jenner should just scat from now on, because this track's cocksure yelps, chirps, trills, coos, squeals and gasps are so winning.

This slice of spiny, lite space-funk tries everything and somehow succeeds, even with a sensational, wtf guitar solo worthy of a hair-metal ballad. Repressed-fart blips and comically overthwacked bass notes suggest that they're adventurously sillying up their Serious Dance Music, much the same way that Pavement used pedals to goof up its Serious Indie Rock on *Wowee Zowee*. The result is major cut-loose fun. You'll wish you could forget the singles soon, but "The Devil" will be the joint that won't get played-out when it gets played out, partly because the song's rough edges seem to exist only to shock you out of attributing its slick rest to something called Scissor Sisters U.S.

Posted by William Bowers in dance on Fri: 09-01-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Yo La Tengo
"Pass the Hatchet, I Think I'm Goodkind"
[2006]
★★★★

"Pass the Hatchet, I Think I'm Goodkind" is an eleven-minute jam (alarm) that opens (alarm) Yo La Tengo's twelfth album. It's got no tune and barely one verse (alarm), but the song confidently follows through with the promise of the album title: It's not afraid of you, and it will kick your ass. Said asskicking is all in the rhythm section. Drummer Georgia Hubley accentuates unlikely notes in James McNew's bass melody, while Ira Kaplan tries to go up their down elevator, scribbling against the flow. He's a creative enough guitarist who stays interesting the whole run, but it's really McNew's five- or six-note theme (it changes slightly at the beginning, if only to let you know there's a human playing it) that makes the song. With guitar as ambience, the track moves tectonically: Kaplan singing one minute and strumming like he has oven mitts on the next, the groove blurring then tightening then blurring and by the last minute promising to run forever. Suddenly "Goodkind" comes to an abrupt, someone-unplugged-the-amp stop; Yo La Tengo have an album to get to.

MP3: Yo La Tengo: Pass the Hatchet, I Think I'm Goodkind

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Fri: 09-01-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Hidden Cameras
"AWOO"
[2006]
★★★★

Structurally, "AWOO" is pretty simple: The verses consist of an almost monotone line, followed by people "awoo"ing, repeated four times each verse, then the chorus, verse, chorus, etc., etc.. The chorus is also a blast of awoos. But the lyrics, which are ridiculous ("If I'm naked on the throne I'll be working in the boneyard"), and the instrumentation, which features a lot of strings and even a glockenspiel, keep "AWOO" as one of those simple-clear songs, not simple-boring. It'd be nice to know what exactly an "AWOO" is--pretty annoying when the word's lodged in your head--but the effect is that HC's Joel Gibb is moving the spotlight away from the song and onto The Song.

Video: The Hidden Cameras: AWOO
Posted by Justin Chun in indie rock on Fri: 09-01-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Michael Zapruder's Rain of Frogs
"Haymaker Market"
[2006]
★★★½
Collaborating with some 20 musicians including Jonathan Siegel of Camper Van Beethoven and Nate Query of the Decemberists, Michael Zapruder makes beautiful folk-pop ballads resonant of the voice of Rufus Wainwright and wordplay of Andrew Bird. "Haymaker Market" is the story of an imperial town's new farmers market that changes the city for the better. New instruments arrive on the song constantly-- an easy enough "people come to farmers market" conceit-- and the song's energy increases likewise, from sweet-talking acoustic strums at the start to the drums and keyboard additions that foreshadow the chorus. About two minutes in, the action stops, and a wild trumpet solo reprises the melody. "They'll use your name/ to name the avenue," Zapruder sings in the finale, putting an end to any suspicions that "Haymaker Market" is secretly about punching things.

MP3: Michael Zapruder's Rain of Frogs: Haymaker Market
Posted by Andy Dubbin in indie rock on Fri: 09-01-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Earl Greyhound
"S.O.S."
[2006]
★★★★½

Just because they're freakishly heavy doesn't mean they're above details. Like, say, singing in harmony. The song's a little 90s and a lot 70s in its empty pummel-- a lot happens but nothing's going on. Its most snarling feedback, even its mightiest kicks, are devoid of rebellion or conflict. So I'm in the awkward position of loving the song but not the tradition it comes out of, i.e. the Guess Who, Van Halen, Wolfmother. When rocking's the end not the means, chops are assumed. Difference is, this trio exhibits rare rhythmic intelligence. They tear through acrobatic fills with immodest aplomb. More than acrobatic, the flourishes come unannounced and at paralyzing volume. But rhythmic intelligence itself isn't enough to melt this much face. Matt Whyte's ballsy vocals, the never-cheated transitions, the sly way the song switches to swung-feel for a finale and then quotes "Dig a Pony"-- that's the stuff that makes the flames extra fiery.

MP3: Earl Greyhound: S.O.S.
Posted by Sam Ubl in rock on Thu: 08-31-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Reverso 68
"Tokyo Disco"
[2006]
★★★★½
Reverso 68's regrettably small oeuvre has already revealed them to be the pre-eminent practitioners of lush, Balearic disco, their delicate slow-motion grooves as otherworldly as Lindstrom and as widescreen as Brennan Green. With "Tokyo Disco" they're perfectly matched to the Glimmers' Eskimo label, and hopefully the pairing will give them the enhanced profile they deserve. Recognizing the opportunity, the duo pull out all their favourite tricks on this astonishing two-part epic. "Part One" drifts through swirling mists of dreamy multi-layered synth chords, gently percolating hand percussion, pulsing live bass and spine-tingling Spanish guitar in a feast of prog-disco excess-- imagine Larry Levan working with Brian Eno. The more propulsive "Part Two" adds an italo-

disco bass squelch, but is just as stratospheric and starbound. Throughout, the duo's secret weapon is the organic evolution of their dub-spacious arrangements: Hooks spiral out of one another as if propelled by a huge ever-growing brain that rules from the center of the universe.
Posted by Tim Finney in disco on Thu: 08-31-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Traxamillion
“Yellow Bus [ft. Mistah F.A.B.]”
[2006]
★★★
If the "Go Dumb" phenomenon has old folks clutching their pearls, Mistah F.A.B. is likely to make them shriek in horror with "Yellow Bus", a song that expands on a line from last year's "Super Sic Wid It": "I do the dummy retarded and ride the yellow bus." It's a harmless extension of the thizz/hyphy code of mindless fun, and Fab has a bouncy, charismatic and quick-witted style that forgives his less-than-sensitive requests to "put your helmets on" and "drool a little." Think Ludacris without the bravado. Not high-brow, but at the end of the day, it's a song about going to school. Ironic, huh? Traxamillion brightens the dull bass thuds omnipresent in hyphy with a skipping snare rim tap and grade-school synth melody for a track that's destined for cult status among the YouTube cognoscenti.
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Thu: 08-31-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tim Hecker
“Radio Spiricom”
[2006]
★★★★
The forthcoming Tim Hecker album *Harmony in Ultraviolet* is a like a musical Jenga tower, each bit hopelessly codependent with what it sits next to, reliant on the whole for its considerable power. So it's hard to remove a single block and not imagine the sound of the other fourteen crashing to earth a split-second later. That said! If any artist understands the full ramifications of destruction, including the latent potential for beauty, it's this guy. Here the only possible word is "fissure": In the opening seconds, the fabric of sound splits and reveals a fizzy cauldron of energy, a speckled potion of feedback and white noise. But the square teeth never chew completely through the quilt of drone that persists underneath, a gently rippling thing that shifts direction like a pre-storm fall breeze. For just under five minutes it holds a hell of a lot.
Posted by Mark Richardson in electronic on Thu: 08-31-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Michael Dracula
“Destroy Yourself”
[2006]
★★★
Sure, everyone these days-- even the dude playing buckets outside 7-11-- has some post-punk on the sleeve. Glaswegian outfit Michael Dracula's distinguishing factor is how unenthusiastically they brandish their PP, how effortlessly comes their cool. The band's pulse reads about as undead as their namesake Transylvanian, like someone sucking the blood out of fellow UK group the Long Blondes. Frontwoman Emily MacLaren steers M.Drac both in songwriting and attitude, languishing over a dub bassline that hardly thinks outside the *Metal Box*. Spastic guitars stab ugly at an otherwise beautified PiL number. "Beautified" not because there's a girl singing, but because the loose ends are all tied up, and the angst concedes to ennui.
Posted by Adam Moerder in disco punk on Thu: 08-31-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Chino XL
“Don't Run From Me [ft. Snoop Dogg & Dre (of Cool & Dre)]”
[2006]
★★★

I'd be hard-pressed to name a rapper who's flirted with stardom longer than Chino XL. Not saying he's old, but dude borrowed from Radiohead's "Creep" when it was brand new. And now, twelve years after his influential debut, he's got his daggers drawn over something that sounds like a Neptunes remix of the Knife. Other than

Cool & Dre's weird, curb-scraping art of noise though, "Don't Run From Me" is the same brand of name-dropping battle rap that once sparked Chino's beef with Tupac. Only this time, the cast of *Idlewild* catches bricks: "Being sober aggravates me like Macy Gray's voice," then "I'm from a war zone where smilin's a bad look like Andre 3000's wardrobe." That's kinda like punching a kid who wears glasses, but it gets even better when Snoop snarls a Craigslist missed connection for a hook: "See me in the street, stop and smoke some bud with me/ In the club, mami, hug me. Girl, don't run from me." Somewhere in Compton, the Game sheds a tattooed tear.

Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Wed: 08-30-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Limp Wrist
"Just Like You"
[2006]
★★★½

Why is Christian Rock the new punk rock? Because those bands care about what they're selling-- care a lot-- and they make a culture out of it: a weird, fucked, mortal-enemy-to-what-we-hold-dear culture, but there it is. On the old punk rock side of the fence, meanwhile, sit Limp Wrist: four gays from across the country who, having decided that a), music hates fags, and b), this country hates fags, formed a band to c), pick up dudes, and d) return the disdain apropos a & b. Like Los Crudos, vocalist Martin Sorrondeguy's old punk haunt, Limp Wrist bypass melodic niceties to blast off on gay-bashing-force rhythm lines and a scant four chords. When they ask, "Would you please fucking hate us," you sense they really mean it, even if they don't mean all the stuff about going to church and having kids and staying away from the YMCA. They're Just Like You, which means you're just like them, even if you don't want to be.

Posted by Zach Baron in hardcore punk on Wed: 08-30-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Luomo
"Really Don't Mind"
[2006]
★★★★

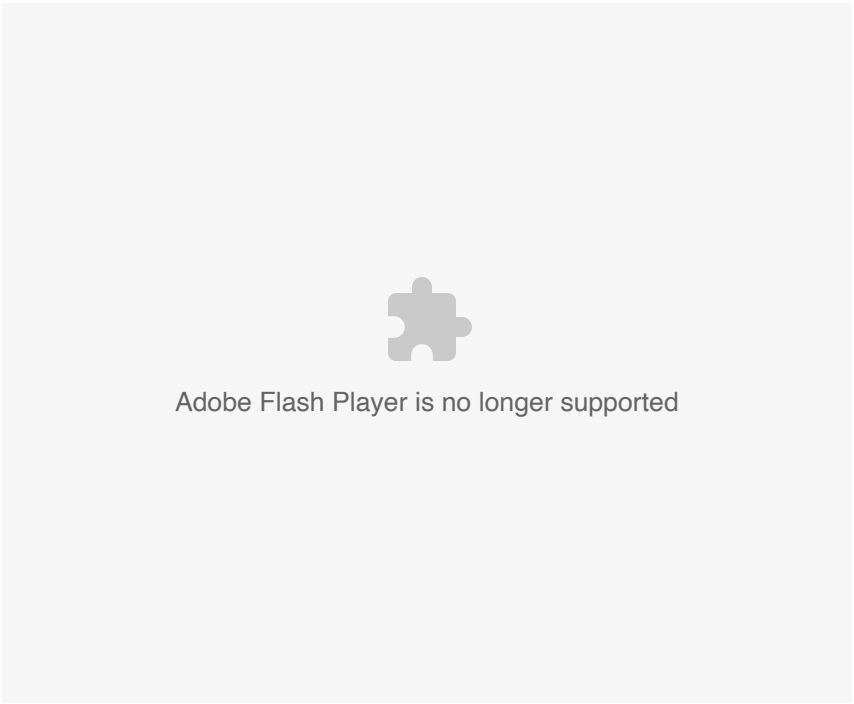
In light of the fact that the twin marathons of "Tessio" and "The Present Lover" probably rank 1 and 1a on the list marked "Luomo Tracks, Best Ever", I feel like a heathen saying the following: This dinky little radio edit of his new single pisses all over its extendamixed album-dwelling cousin, and from a pretty great height. Where the pressurized, slow-release pleasures of a track like "The Present Lover" were dispensed in protracted, tightly controlled spirals, "Really Don't Mind" is built to deliver a more immediate rush. That means instead of vocal melodies that wind slowly and assuredly towards an unseen resolution, we get a series of pulsing vocal hooks freshened further by their almost instantaneous echo response time. With Finnish jazznik and longtime collaborator Johanna Iivanainen back lending vocal duties, and Luomo's usual palette of gushy and whooshy sounds once again on display, there's a lot of points of familiarity as well. But where you could yodel into a Luomo single and not hear your echo back for days, there are moments in "Really Don't Mind" where he's spelunking in some pretty narrow spaces. The water ain't as deep, but it's still just as warm.

MP3: Luomo: Really Don't Mind

Posted by Mark Pytlik in microhouse on Wed: 08-30-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Carrie Underwood
"Don't Forget to Remember"
[2006]
★★

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41



This *American Idol* winner delivers a leaving-home anthem that has the distinct misfortune of recalling the Dixie Chicks' pre-fall-out hit "Wide Open Spaces", which, far from their best track, easily proves superior. As emotionally authoritative as a Hallmark card, Underwood's voice is too squeaky-clean to convey any real sense of young-adult confusion or bittersweet homesickness, and the music itself is country-pop at its blandest: a clunky piano ballad dressed up with fiddles and steel guitar.

Then again, "Don't Forget to Remember" isn't supposed to portray a real-life crisis, but the idealized Daddy's Little Girl-- someone who's true to God, country, and family and for whom the evils of alcohol, sex, or secular music hold utterly no temptation. "Here's a map and here's a Bible/ if you ever lose your way," the moms tells Underwood before Underwood makes her way downtown-- as if Underwood would even know *how* to lose her way. The song's hollow homilies don't reflect any sort of lived experience, but instead give listeners vague moral instruction while congratulating them for being so wholesome and good. It's the country equivalent of a 50s mental hygiene film, or a bumper sticker.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Wed: 08-30-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Afternoon Penis
“Love Among the Stacks”
[2006]
★★★

Midday's answer to Morningwood? Test Icicles' touring buddies? The way you greet your mother, i.e. "Afternoon, penis!"? Given who AP is (Brooklyn's Nate Nelson from noise-rock's Mouthus) and where AP comes from (giggle), "Love Among the Stacks" is far groovier than expected-- percussion-heavy, but less chaotic than Mouthus, and less precise as well. Nelson lays off the bronze and turns away from squall, and it's presumably his low grunts that creep over the right-side speaker. The muted, wrapped-in-cotton tribal drumming stays mussy until misaligned edges start to match up and little polyrhythms appear. Clean high tones whistle over the top, each holding on too long, like the old man died at the church organ. The last third is an extended denouement, drums punctuating faraway anguished sighs. All fine, but my friend was in a band called Anal Tooth, so don't get too proud.

Posted by Jessica Suarez in noise on Wed: 08-30-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dondolo
“Dragon (Shit Robot Fire Breathing Mix)”
[2006]
★★★½
As much as it pains me to pun, Shit Robot really is the shit. SR a/k/a Markus Lampkin’s “The Wrong Galaxy”/”Triumph” 12-inch earlier this year was a) arguably one of the better 2006 nu-cosmic/Italo records, and b) definitely the coolest thing out on DFA at that moment. This remix for Dondolo is only going to endear Robot anywhere punky disco and 11-minute “Yeah” crescendos are valued. (And let’s fess up, house snobs: “Yeah” crescendos are pretty great.) Anyway, that’s mentioning nothing of the female “chorus”-- a campy "dragon... uh-huh... dragon... rarrr..." and repeat-- which, without getting too racey here, has Suicide Girls charm: vampiric, and a little bored. I am aware, however, that 11-minute dance tracks aren’t necessarily for everyone not among the Kompakt weekly email update-receiving crowd. I could talk about pacing, but maybe you just want a punchline.
Stream: Dondolo: Dragon (Shit Robot Fire Breathing Mix)
Posted by Dominique Leone in nu-disco on Tue: 08-29-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

New Young Pony Club
“The Get Go”
[2006]
★★★★
Ear fatigue, waning appetite, and the creeping deficit of empty space on the office electroclash/postpunk/new-disco family tree/hookup whiteboard suggest we don't need any more boy-girl bands who wear lots of plastic accessories, dress like art-schooled parrots, spend 1/5 of their live show splayed out in palsy, and play synths like they're drums and drums like they're icepicks. But fuck! This is actually really, really good. As the genre demands, the UK's New Young Pony Club have the Factory motorik thing and the platitudinous sing-speak thing in check, but the success of these slow-burning new-wave-type singles is really defined by build and timing, and this one's constructed perfectly. It starts out like a pitched-down "Love Is a Battlefield" and layers up from there, till it's a tidy whirlwind of Telecastered squeals, whispering basslines, punchy vocal callbacks ("the get/gooooo") and irresistible "ba ba ba-da ba" bits. Between these guys, Poni Hoax, Pony Pants and Pony Up, could 'pony' be the new 'wolf'? Oh Ginuwine, so prescient.
Stream: New Young Pony Club: The Get Go
Posted by Mark Pytlik in electroclash on Tue: 08-29-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Mary J. Blige
“Turn Out the Lights (Remix) [ft. Jay-Z and T.I]”
[2006]
★★

We're fooling ourselves thinking that every Jay-Z feature these days is worth more than a cursory listen. Whether missing the simple elegance of Young Jeezy's "Go Crazy" by getting exceedingly self-referential, flitting around like a ninny on his lady's "Déjà Vu", or aping Rick Ross's un-flow on the "Hustlin'" remix, Jay just hasn't been coming hard. And yet, even here, we continue to chart a retiree puttering around his garden.

"Turn Out the Lights" is notable because it's the first official pairing of Jigga and his would-be Southern heir, Tip. Over the less-than-ominous sound of a person slapping an oscillating fan with a Slim Jim, Jay opens things with a come-on ("I'ma make it do what it do, baby") and then drops the dreaded electricity gag ("Give her an excuse to turn off the lights like Con Edison do"). This is the work of a person who either couldn't give a damn about his 16s or is saving up the goods for a certain unspecified return. T.I. gets carte blanche to lure a lady as well, which is the m.o.; he is only slightly less interesting than Jay. Mary, meanwhile, is steady in the face of Jay's smirking, as she often has been in their collaborations. But her subject matter (i.e. will you still make love to her if she keeps it hood?) leaves a bit to be desired. Such a strong female artist needs more than a fuck-buddy.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in r&b on Tue: 08-29-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Loney, Dear
“Le Fever”
[2006]
★★★½

Loney, Dear's Emil Svanängen might be the Thom Yorke of the current Swede-pop bumper crop, although we're talking cunning solo Thom, not big-top Radiohead Thom. "Le Fever" relies on acoustic lines instead of digital loops for its cool propulsion, but the resultant sense of glassy, disassociated drift is of a piece with *Eraser* tracks like "Black Swan". Which is to say that, in contrast to the sublime overstatement of I'm From Barcelona or the Legends, Loney, Dear deals in insinuation. Taut acoustic guitars, the tattoo of chiming percussion, flute fugues--everything studiously unfurls, flowing like line-hung linen in a breeze, even throughout the ominously vacant middle expanse and the squalling climax. Le fever in question is, of course, romantic despair, although Svanängen's frosty elocution makes him sound more like someone inhabiting the chill sheen that comes after the flush of the moment, swooning more out of weary habit than compulsion.

Posted by Brian Howe in indie pop on Tue: 08-29-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Uncle Murder
“Murdera!”
[2006]
★½

Uncle Murder, no relation to the Professor, is Green Lantern's first real run at the cheddar since Eminem deposed Lantern as the official Shady DJ. In other words, ears ought to be perked. But Murder, a Brooklyn by way of the gravel pit formalist, has all the lyrical finesse of a bologna sandwich. His bark, no joke, most closely resembles G-Unit's Tony Yayo, which in the land of mixtapes is like getting compared to Pol Pot. He has a deep, angry tone and groans "Unnnngh" for no apparent reason. He pronounces "Jaw" like "Jowwww" with a vaguely African lilt at the end of his phrasings, and he most certainly cannot ride a beat. He says, "I'll hit cha in ya face then I'll hit ya up some more." For this sneer, Lantern has lifted the rocksteady churn of Barrington Levy's "Murderer", a track once blessed by Rakim. The charmless MC in question, meanwhile, is actually named Uncle Murder.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Tue: 08-29-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Madvillain
“Monkey Suite”
[2006]
★★★

The sequel to *Madvillainy* hasn't got much buzz right now-- odd, considering it was the last truly slobbered-over independent rap record of the last three or four years. The first trickle, "Monkey Suite," is perfectly fine: Madlib's drunk and stumbling keys, blaring electric piano, a diffident bass line. It feels competent. It sounds exactly like what you think it might. Safety is a bad look for Madlib, worse still for MF Doom. The song's so normal in fact it may have you reaching for its predecessor, just to make sure "Accordion" is as faultless as you remember. Doom raps, "This go out to all my brothers doin' long bids/ And sisters who got brothers bein' fathers to the wrong kids." It's a classically circuitous line from Doom, about nothing, and in all likelihood, everything. Only we can't refract its meaning without the accompanying album. Maybe Doom's game here is merely a series of knick-knack phrases strung together, maybe it's more meaningful.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Mon: 08-28-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

n0 things
“Have It Your Way”
[2006]

★★★½

Just in time for the Touch & Go 25: These Brooklynites move further from the rank-and-file dance-punk of their old band Liars and into bigger, blacker territory. That spindly, spidery mindfuck of an intro riff could easiy have died via disco beating, but n0 things let it thrive and writhe a gurgling math-metal crawl. While not as enjoyably anti-anti-anthem as "Just Say It", there's still a grin to "Have It Your Way" despite the apocalyptic guitars and tortured vocal performance from frontman Christian Dautresme, who yelps and moans his way to the song's ultimate point: "Don't break your neck, sonny/ Don't you break your neck." After three minutes of grind and a worthless shoegaze catch-yer-breath, it's easier said than done.

Posted by Adam Moerder in rock on Mon: 08-28-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Frida Hyvönen Frida Hyvönen
“You Never Got Me Right”
[2006]
★★★★

Frida Hyvönen must be fluent in Pianoese. Her sprightly keys seem a direct translation of the faltering epiphany that colors her lyrics and inflections, so this song moves from uncertainty to strength with symmetrically trebled force. Hyvönen's piano trips over increasingly insistent phrases; hesitating, it swings back in with thunderous conviction. Her voice, like something recently uncaged, describes the same dogged ascent. Tumbling recklessly through dizzy passages of blue, it sweeps up, tenderly flayed, and vanishes into sunburst vowels. The same flailing motion toward self-reclamation plays out over the lyrics. Hyvönen's address to a cold-fish ex who said that her love was "just aesthetic" begins as self-castigation tinged with indignant rebuke, then gradually inverts as she realizes some things about transference, culminating in the final stanza's triumphant light bulb. "You never got me right," she concludes, and then she's gone.

MP3: Frida Hyv&#65533;nen: You Never Got Me Right
Posted by Brian Howe in indie on Mon: 08-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Holy Hail
“County Fair Part Two ”
[2006]
★★★½

Make room for these guys between Love Is All and Long Blondes-- swooning, lovesick hooks that are nonetheless aloof enough to land the band some gigs at Cake Shop. You know how New York drummers are basically required to make their eighth notes sound as labored as possible? This guy's a pro. So the song is disco-beat stiff but breezy still. A stubborn synth-piano carries the three-note melody, and guitar contributions are limited to faint upbeats. The pre-chorus proves a tease, just an excuse for vocalist Cat to break out from the verses' galloping 'round-the-mountain sing-speak ("The mighty buffalo make the river run slow/ Keep a hold now") and actually sing. There's an unexpected bridge with hypnotic guitar pulses, but the bigger surprise is the song's gentle country-western lilt, something I didn't pick up on till I heard them say, "Geronimo."

Stream: Holy Hail: County Fair Part Two
Posted by Sam Ubl in rock on Mon: 08-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

DJ Cousin Cole
“Atlantic Records, T.I. Clearance”
[2006]
★★★

Couple weeks ago I'm in the Honda jamming to Justin Timberlake's "My Love" when my bud Zach turns to me and says, "That is the most annoying shit I've ever heard." At first I don't know what he was talking about; the song sounds great. Then it dawned, seizing on me like any suicidally annoying white noise we're evolutionarily

programmed to tune out for survival: *Atlantic Records... for T.I. clearance*. Same drop, every fourth bar, in perpetuity.

In the tradition of the internet being hilarious, DJ Cousin Cole keeps that promobot mantra and dispenses with the rest, letting Clearance Guy talk his shit for two-plus minutes over Timbaland's heavenward rave synths before detouring into gutter. It's the apotheosis of musical Marxism-- that much mic time on a Timb track's worth, what, three million these days?

Consider the promotional cycle. Early-stage demos appear, slathered with territorial markings, the MP3s often sub-radio quality and totally unlistenable next to the finished product. But they become an entity unto themselves, a placeholder for Obsessives. Who. Can't. Live. Without. Newshit. Daily. So what happens three days later when the first hack cracks his watermarked advance? Do the rest of us chuck the 96 kbps proto-banger in an endless quest for hard drive tidiness? No, we paint a mustache on it and call it art.

Stream: Cousin Cole: Atlantic Records, T.I. Clearance
Posted by Sam Ubl in wtf on Mon: 08-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Kelis
“Bossy (Alan Braxe and Fred Falke Remix)”
[2006]
★★★★½
The original plays self-empowerment as a snarl, Kelis calmly humming to herself as producer Bangladesh lays water-torture synth plinks over a drum track sparse enough to make "Laffy Taffy" sound like a damn symphony. So Braxe and Falke take it in the opposite direction, squishing muscles and organs and nerve-endings onto the track's cold skeleton. Minimal pop becomes lush, opulent disco-house: dinging cowbells, Seinfeld bass-popping, squelchy Moroder keyboards. And somehow, Kelis's valley-girl sneer morphs into a luxuriant sigh when Braxe and Falke speed it up just slightly. Halfway through, all the vocals drop out for a minute or two, so that the track builds and expands and breathes on its own. When Kelis returns, she suddenly sounds like the sort of boss who doesn't stare over your shoulder when you're finishing up that spreadsheet.
Posted by Tom Breihan in disco house on Fri: 08-25-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Blow
“Parentheses”
[2006]
★★★★
There's legitimate beef to be had with The Blow's violent, the-world-is-yours, all-material-out-is-our-material appropriation of other people's shit. MySpace it: Now playing, The Police, except The Blow call it "Come On Petunia". And see here: Recognize those "Parentheses" handclaps? First five or six seconds of "My Boyfriend's Back", no? That said, said beef is not mine. The Blow detour the Angels' handclaps into "Stars Are Blind" reggae and midi-bass-groove before letting them go, then ride that goofy keyboard funk to the second best lyric in the song: "When you're, holding me/ We make a pair of parentheses." The bridge bottoms out, Khaela Maricich says, "There's something in the deli aisle," and you are sure the next lyric will be, "That makes you smile." But then she says, "That makes you cry." Heartbreaking not-rhyme, and it's all hers.

Stream: The Blow: Parentheses
Posted by Zach Baron in indie pop on Fri: 08-25-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Gabriel Ananda
“Doppelwhipper (Live)”
[2006]
★★★★
There’s a reason some people think this stuff is the new post-rock: Imagine Can wormholed into the early 21st century, a little stiff from the trip, but completely fucking in tune with PCI slots and information theory. And you know what? There isn’t even a guitar in there. Ananda (who is *still* getting props for last year’s “Ihre Personliche

Glucksmelodie") isn't always in this mode, but on this track (and others like the recent "AC/DC" single) he nails your elders' motorik, with major software updates. Andyouknowhatelse: Some other people call this "minimal house."
Posted by Dominique Leone in minimal house on Fri: 08-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Trae
"Cadillac [ft. Paul Wall and Three 6 Mafia]"
[2006]
★★★★

In the Houston dermis, Trae's name is inked on the sole of the city's right foot: You won't recognize him unless you're already familiar with the anatomy, but he'll be right there when it stomps you in the face. Fittingly, his subcutaneous murmur rides under this track's oozing synths like a chigger. Trae owns one of the great voices in a city full of them. He's nasally like a kid with bad allergies but he obviously has no trouble breathing, stringing together crisply enunciated syllables that just seem to spill out from his mouth. He's also got a jazz drummer's sense of phrasing. These hover between swung and straight feel, taking off in rapid fits then settling back down in a calm trot fit for a song about his new car: "24s, hit a switch, sit sideways/ Trae's flippin' through the hood like I'm running through a maze." Paul Wall and Three 6 Mafia lend moral support.

Stream: Trae: Cadillac [ft. Paul Wall and Three 6 Mafia]
Posted by Sam Ubl in hip hop on Fri: 08-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Morning Benders
"Grain of Salt"
[2006]
★★★

Dudes, turn the drums down. As the Morning Benders strum up a genial acoustic shuffle, Tom Peyton's snare drum sounds over-mic'ed, tagging the beat like a wet towel on a bare ass. It's clumsy production, not shoddy conception, and it doesn't ruin the song or anything. But the drums *are* distracting, like trying to watch a movie through a buzz of static. What's behind those drums is worth hearing though, as this Bay Area band manage to appropriate Pavement's smirking shamble to their own lovesick, non-smartass ends. That's not new, but it seems nevertheless notable: "Grain of Salt" is geeky but not whiny, melancholic but not pessimistic. Chris Chu sings like he can't believe his good fortune finding someone who might actually accept him and his perpetually broken heart. "Take my heart with a grain of salt," he suggests. He's a romantic in a cynic's game, fighting against his own dim expectations and that damn snare drum, just to be heard.

Stream: The Morning Benders: Grain of Salt
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie on Fri: 08-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Wolf Eyes
"The Driller"
[2006]
★★★★

I didn't think that the addition of Hair Police's Mike Connelly would amount to much. At the end of the day, Wolf Eyes and Hair Police are similar groups, in that they both produce harsh, grating, pretty damn scary noise that I

happen to think is pretty damn beautiful. But judging from "The Driller", Connelly's contribution to the band is growing incredibly apparent: a patience and a sense of build, restraint, and release greater here than even on Wolf Eyes' last Sub Pop outing *Burned Mind*. When the howling vocals kick in halfway through, "The Driller" sounds like the usual Wolf Eyes slasher flick-- strangled electronic yelps, an insidious thump-- but the track's curiously more evil too, as if Wolf Eyes did in fact "drill" to the underworld to play "The Driller". At the track's end, obviously, sorry, hell breaks loose.

Posted by Justin Chun in noise on Thu: 08-24-06: 12:45 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Rick Ross vs. Simian Mobile Disco
"Hustlin' Hustler (Cadence Weapon Hi-Speed Edit)"
[2006]
★★★★½

Despite this track being one of those "wow, both songs have the same word in their titles!" mashups, my skepticism was washed away by the top-shelf source material: the rapper Rick Ross's "Hustlin'" and French electro-house producer Simian Mobile Disco's "Hustler." Where the original SMD track raucously dilated on record store theft, Rick swaggered through a hard-knocks study of cocaine distribution. Moralities, of course, made an easy target. Cadence Weapon smartly assaults the atmosphere instead. Dragged through the mud of filthy, bubbling synths, "Hustlin' Hustler" trades garden-variety muscle for pure dystopian menace.

From the SMD song Cadence (full disclosure: he's former P4k writer Rollie Pemberton) scrounges a single hook, not before slowing it down and slicing it in half, leaving the line "I'm a hustler, baby" drained of pep and freed from the excuse: "That's what my dad has made me." The message: No one's asking for sympathy now. With Ross's story relocated from its posh haunted-house digs to a new shanty in the wasteland, you get the feeling you're gazing into a crystal ball, looking past the inner city's bleak present to its apocalyptic future. It's the feeling that you've fast-forwarded to the American endgame. Funny, Weapon's Canadian.

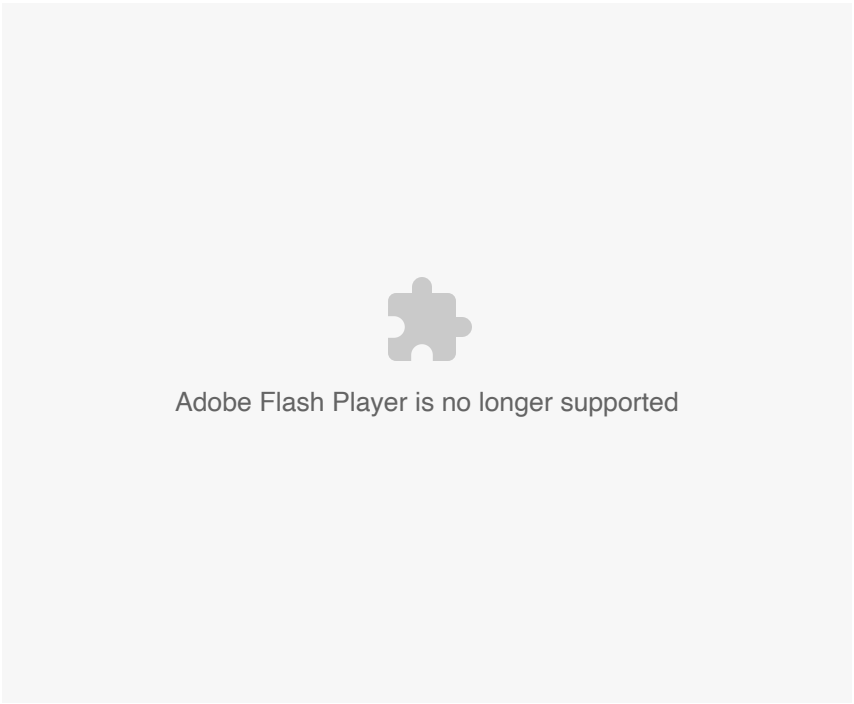
MP3: Rick Ross vs. Simian Mobile Disco: Hustlin' Hustler (Cadence Weapon Hi-Speed Edit)
Posted by Roque Strew in mashup on Thu: 08-24-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Kris Menace Presents Stars 33
"I Feel Music In Your Heart (Kris Menace and Lifelike mix)"
[2006]
★★★½

Are you ready for sunshine? Alan Braxe associates Kris Menace and Lifelike (responsible for last year's "Discopolis") may land squarely in that feted French school of anime-sequined disco, but on this new mix of a Stars 33 track from 2003, they prove that there are still diamonds to be mined from the soles of the form. The mantra: "I feel music innnnnnn...your heart!" The keyboards: fuzzy and plush, with the hint of a phasing effect not heard on a new (non-Air) record since 1974. The vibe: They really do feel music in your heart. And somehow, despite overwhelming potential for everything to collapse under its own cartoon-cute melodrama, it seems just sweet-- and escapist, but everyone already knows that. Big blinking RIYL: *The Upper Cuts* and the good Daft Punk; let's all hope for more.

Stream: Kris Menace Presents Stars 33: I Feel Music In Your Heart (Kris Menace and Lifelike mix)
Posted by Dominique Leone in electro house on Thu: 08-24-06: 09:32 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cassie
"Me & U"
[2006]
★★★½



She's a model and she's looking good, and for Diddy and Tommy Mottola, that's more than enough reason to lock her in a recording studio and buy another yacht. But "Me & U" is about the song, an icy-hot appropriation of new-wave's detached sleekness. The motive extends to Cassie's pseudo-alluring whispers, and given the lyrics, it's probably a good thing she's whispering. Her sweet nothings aren't nearly as affecting when separated from the video (the dance studio one, or the unreleased Paris Hilton homage), but they work well enough to get out the way of those glacial and graceful synth swoons. Folks might write Cassie off as Bad Boy's Teairra Marie, and could even mark this down as a crass rewrite of "Make Her Feel Good". The difference, however, lies in what makes Cassie feel good: "I was waitin' for you to tell me you were ready/ I know what to do if only you would let me." She's talking about video games.

Stream: Cassie: Me & U
Posted by David Raposa in r&b on Thu: 08-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Earlimart
“Answers and Questions”
B-Side: Earlimart
“Caruthers Boy”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★★
B-Side: ★★★½

Aaron Espinoza's obsession with studio gadgetry is as well-documented as his similarities to Elliott Smith, but he manages to keep both in check on this Suicide Squeeze 7". As in previous songs (especially "The Movies" from *Everyone Down Here*), Earlimart play with a multitude of cinematic elements-- synths on the A-side, movie strings on the B-side, and a parallax layering of instruments on both-- wrapping them tightly around the lyrics so that the music creates a widescreen scope while retaining the immediacy of power pop. "Questions and Answers" is as tightly plotted as a Hitchcock flick: Boxed strings establish a palpable paranoia, and grandiose piano chords build to a climax of gunplay guitars, which abruptly drop into an ambient denouement. The hero dies, apparently.

"Caruthers Boy" may not be as precisely arranged, but what the song lacks in urgency it makes up for in specificity. As the lyrics suggest, the proper noun in the title-- along with the reference to "Mark"-- refers to a family that may be falling apart as its members become more and more withdrawn. The song isn't a thriller, but a coming-of-age story with its own slow pace and loose structure. It might even seem a little slow but for the

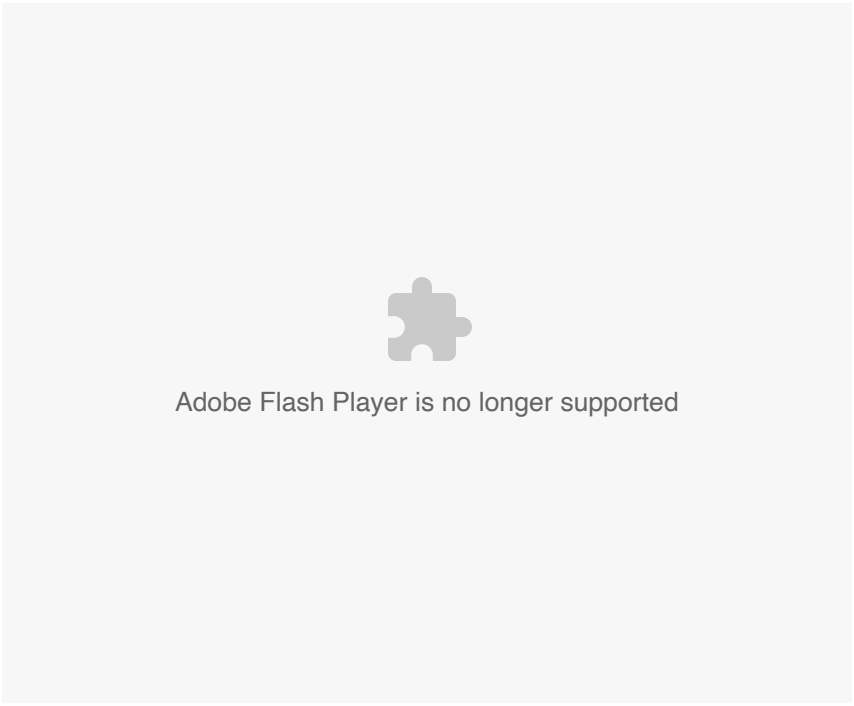
battling vocals from Espinoza and Ariana Murray, whose harmonies have the barely contained tension of a dinner-table disagreement.

Stream: Earlimart: Answers and Questions
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie rock on Thu: 08-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Yeah Yeah Yeahs
“Diamond Sea (Sonic Youth cover) ”
[2006]
★★★½
Unclear whose star's hitching whose wagon here: SY and YYY have been parading around like tabloid inamoratas lately, making out at stoplights, sharing milkshakes, co-headlining pool parties. Now they're fucking with covers. Bad idea if you ask me-- New York torch-passings mostly end in fire. Smartly, the Yeahs take the humble route, opting for lame strums and letting Karen O coo the chowder-thick guitar hook. She blows Thurston Moore's original vocal wide open, picking up on the song's discreet marching quality without drowning it in lugubriousness. A late, great boys-only bridge coaxes *Endless Summer* vibes from Nick Zinner's reverb-soused amp, with brushed snare scratches providing the obvious wave metaphor. I still prefer the Youth's quarter-hour wash cycle, but at least, as iTunes Music Store user Insane Harry Potter Fan!!! puts it, this take is "good to study to."

Other: Yeah Yeah Yeahs: Diamond Sea (Sonic Youth cover)
Posted by Sam Ubl in rock on Wed: 08-23-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Danity Kane Danity Kane
“Show Stopper [ft. Yung Joc]”
[2006]
★★



The typical moan: Today's pop stars are soulless svengali inventions without personality. Danity Kane easily fit this cranky cry, having come together as a result of MTV's Diddy-curated "Making the Band". Except, because the cameras follow these five girls everywhere, that no-personality thing is rendered bunk. How else would I know D. Wells loves anime? "Show Stopper" is an airy piece of production, though. Constructed around a pedestrian snap&b beat courtesy of Pretty Ricky producer Jim Jonsin, it lacks the bass necessary to elevate breathy singers Aubrey and Aundrea. Without the bottom support, they sound like a swarm of hummingbirds-- no blend, no unity. There's also a chopped and screwed bridge and a few mentions of "hyphy" on the outro,

completing the 18-month rap microgenre triumvirate. Which makes me think, maybe Danity should just sing about anime. That would probably make more sense.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in pop on Wed: 08-23-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Photo by Jason Frank Rothenberg A-Side: Black Dice
“Manoman”
B-Side: Black Dice
“Gore/Toka Toka”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★½
B-Side: ★★★★½
The title track here seems to be the predicted reaction of Black Dice listeners: man, oh man. Moving past *Broken Ear Record*'s loud, colorful futurism, the band aims mostly for the percussive and primitive. "Manoman" pounds like a heartbeat, as chopped-up vocals and aimless synths hint like footprints at an longlost song. That fades into "Gore", the real masterpiece here. Like Eno's "The Big Ship" on *Another Green World*, the track has one contour--big crescendo, big decrescendo--though the synths chirp more than squirm, the drums bang more than whimper, and with eyes closed it'd be difficult *not* to picture some kind of spectacular and generally awesome parade. At 4/4 and a more danceable tempo, "Toka Toka" comes off like a compact "Cone Toaster"--nothing new for Black Dice, but not a slag either.

Stream: Black Dice: Gore

Posted by Justin Chun in experimental on Wed: 08-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Nice Boys The Nice Boys
“Ain't Been Beat”
[2006]
★★★½
Intentionally or not, ex-Exploding Hearts guitarist Terry Six and his new band nail the uptight "Ed Sullivan Show" aura better than so many self-proclaimed 1960s throwbackers out there. Six sings he "ain't been beat" while sounding *totally* beat, most likely from the jangly Byrds-style intro riff that almost escapes his less-than-nimble fingers. Miraculously though they straddle that fine line between brilliance and bush league long enough to generate three minutes of coherent (endearing even) power-pop. Six spends most of the song dosing on Nyquil, but he perks up for the final verse, when the melody levels up an octave and the high school cafeteria gauntlet's thrown down: "Lookin' for trouble/ You found me/ Ain't been beat!" Too bad the bullies weren't listening.

Stream: The Nice Boys: Ain't Been Beat

Posted by Adam Moerder in power pop on Wed: 08-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Sailboats Are White Sailboats Are White
“Led Eye”
[2006]
★★★
Sometimes the most promising bands are those who have no concept of what's a bad idea. Witness Sailboats Are White, a sassy half-industrial/half-hardcore act who try ripping Big Black but end up a snotty self-satisfied late-era Blur. If the "Led Eye" vocals weren't such an afterthought, Sailboats would be a hell of a lot more listenable. But as is, there's just some muffled blubbering about finding a "new place" before the singer wishes intestinal cancer on the listener (though not before poking your eye out with a pencil). Then come the Muzak keyboards, wet straight-though-the-boards guitar, and one big, heartfelt "Whoo!" The whole thing sounds like a gimmick gone horribly awry, like "The Rockafeller Skank" mixed with "Territorial Pissings". A total mess, but a sincere blast.

Stream: Sailboats Are White: Led Eye

Posted by Jason Crock in hardcore on Wed: 08-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Beyonce
“Ring the Alarm”
[2006]
★★★½

Beyonce has done a whole lot of things with her voice over the past nine years, but she's never howled for blood. So "Ring the Alarm" registers first as shock, an unglued screech of rage and defiance, the last thing we'd expect from someone who's worked like a machine to convince us that we love her. The song is on some irresistibly devious "Cry Me a River" shit -- first-rate tabloid-pop. Instead of brushing off Jay-Z's rumored dalliance with Rihanna, she's seized on it to launch her brand-new wronged-woman character. And like "Cry Me a River," it's intended to announce Beyonce's arrival as an artiste, to reveal new depths and nuances beneath the gorgeous surface she's made a career out of showing.

But "Cry Me a River" dazzled on the strength of its symphonic complexity, while "Ring the Alarm" is an engine of simplistic fury. Everything about it is calculated for maximum neck-snap impact: siren wails, concussive drum-cracks, trebly and discordant synths. And Beyonce herself is either deeply pissed or unbelievably good at conveying the impression of being deeply pissed. It's weirdly exciting to hear her magnificent voice being run through megaphone distorto-filters like she was, say, Al Jourgenson, and even more so to hear her turn that hegemonic roar into an accusatory yowl. "Alarm" is media shitstorm as music, but it's hard to be mad at anything or anybody this mad.

Posted by Tom Breihan in r&b on Tue: 08-22-06: 12:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Akron/Family
“Blessing Force”
[2006]
★★★

Showing journalistic acumen, Akron/Family put all the action upfront. Guitars tap out Glass-y ostinatos, sweet-sounding drums absorb "Sing Sing Sing" tom hits, someone farts. (You can't actually hear that last part but it's suggested.) This goes on for two minutes until moral and rhythmic order break down and these crazy guys start

yelping-- off-key, off-beat, off-color. Then comes the nut in the pudding: a freewheeling classic rock fracas, with twelve-string and the rest.

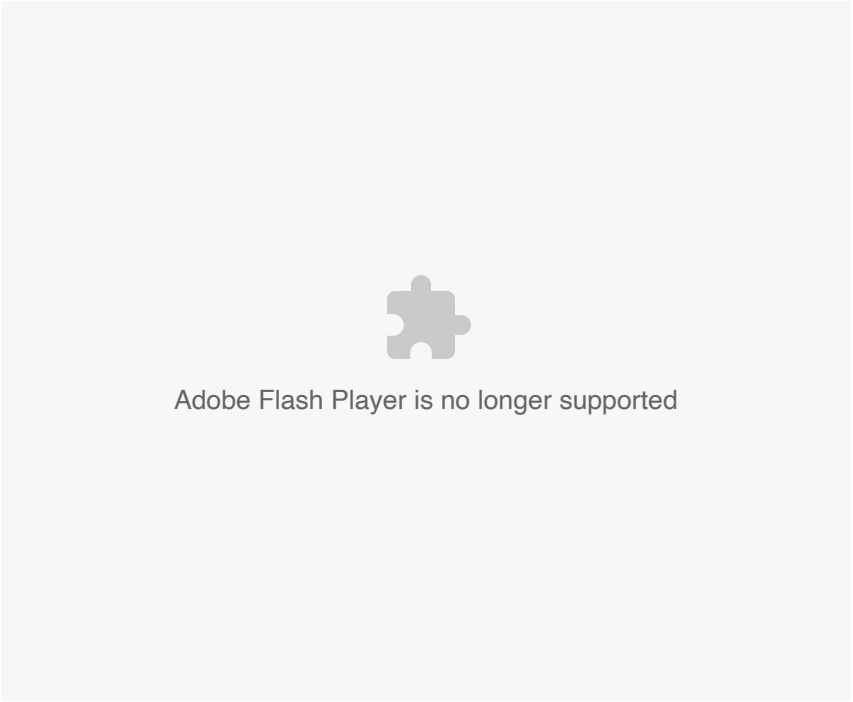
That said, chop off the song's last two minutes. They're totally extraneous and terrible. Imagine if marathons included a mandatory two-mile sacrificial sprint after the finish line, just so spectators could watch all the runners shit themselves and fall down and get tangled up in those aluminum capes. The end of this song is just like that. Not saying if you listen to the entire thing you're a bad person-- only if you like it.

Posted by Sam Ubl in avant folk on Tue: 08-22-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Client
“Zerox Machine (Terence Fixmer Mix)”
[2006]
★★★★
Some people don't think spidery, electroshock minimalist patterns are the best way to enhance by-the-numbers pop-goth, but those people probably aren’t French techno DJ/producer Terence Fixmer. And since I had to hear that pop-goth, I’m glad he figured out how to mangle it so. Said patterns run right through the center of this track, like twin neon-lite locomotives, so if you were hoping for that nice old minimal house subtlety, please hope elsewhere. Fixmer gives the band a chance to sing at the “bridge”, stretching their voices out with computers and other things suitably designed to deconstruct the source material as quickly and drastically as possible.
Posted by Dominique Leone in electro house on Tue: 08-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Uzeda Uzeda
“Steam, Rain & Other Stuff”
[2006]
★★★½
Just in time for Touch and Go's big-ass 25th anniversary bash, Italian noise rockers Uzeda return from an eight-year hiatus without missing a beat. "Steam" twitches and jerks like vintage late 1980s T&G material, though Giovanna Cacciola's ghastly banshee howls borrow heavily from 4AD's marquee female vocalists from the same era. As the title suggests, we have a battle between natural beauty and disillusionment here. Just when Cacciola settles on a melody barely resembling something pretty, the band pulls the rug out from under her, launching into one tortuous section after another. Meanwhile, the search for that third complementary element to steam and rain grows increasingly bleak, and by eschewing a conventional chorus (and arguably any semblance to even a verse), the band succumbs to that clangy "other stuff."
MP3: Uzeda: Steam, Rain & Other Stuff
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Tue: 08-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Toby Keith Toby Keith
“A Little Too Late”
[2006]
★★★★



On the second single from *White Trash With Money*, Toby Keith-- who's a smarter songwriter than he usually gets credit for-- sounds simultaneously damaged and determined as he sings about finally packing up and moving on. But the song, while straightforward, is anything but simple. In fact, the track recalls prime Dwight Yoakam not just in its rough-and-tumble grace and lovestruck conflictedness, but also for its savvy navigation of country music's past. Those sweeping strings nod to Owen Bradley without actually sounding nostalgic, and the shuffling percussion vibes on 1970s SoCal lite-rock (read: the Eagles) without actually sucking. That George Harrison-style guitar on the soaring coda is the perfect cap, especially since it doesn't sound Beatlesque. Like the best musicians-- and unlike some indie artists-- Keith can make use of all these sources without sounding like there are quotes around them, which means nothing gets between him and his audience.

Stream: Toby Keith: A Little Too Late
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Tue: 08-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The New Violators
“Burma”
[2006]
★★★★
A recent trip to Norway's Øya Festival delivered countless great moments, but nothing bowled me over more than the New Violators' raucous late-night set at Mono in downtown Oslo. Sprinkle Ziggy Stardust era-Bowie over anthemic melancholia reminiscent of Junior Boys covering OMD covering *Louder Than Bombs*. Repeat.

The end results are, well, *louder* than that might suggest. But for now you'll just have to trust me, because "Burma" is the only available track. The 3:33 anthem features a Russian-debutante rhythm and a girl, his "favorite sinner," "tattooed in melodic scars." Or, "stars." It's hard to say, but either way, the image is lovely. Even when the band finally kicks up a dust storm, Per Borten croons suavely, no emo-via-Bono yelps. Stretching out the midnight tableau, a run-for-the-finish-line chorus takes some time to arrive: When it does, it shows with New Order keys and hop-skip drums.

I'm placing a lot of emphasis on a single dose of elegant pop from an unsigned band, but judging from the live show, and the strength of the entirely engrossing set (not a single dud-- and I'd never heard them before), they could blow any number of more established art-stars out of the water.

Stream: The New Violators: Burma

Posted by Brandon Stosuy in indie pop on Mon: 08-21-06: 12:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fam-Lay
"Da Beeper Record [ft. Pharrell]"
[2006]
★★★★½

Star Trak's diet coke-rapper Fam-Lay can stretch his style without losing its shape. Beats to rhyme, old school form follows old school funktion. "Hit me on my beeper," Pharrell kindly suggests on hustler Fam's behalf over an un-Neptuneslike shuffle of flimsy drum-machine hits, a cheeseball dream-sequence wind chime, and what sounds like the original Macintosh error sound. This is serious revisionist history: So in 2006, Fam comes across like a 1984 version of Mike Jones. Except Fam can rap, managing serpentine, mile-long lines and almost whole verses free of enjambment. For the people who don't know what the hell enjambment means, he throws a few bones: "Catch me on a night shift like the Commodores," and more importantly, "my shit is bigger than knuckles on midgets." So now you know.

MP3: Fam-Lay: Da Beeper Record [ft. Pharrell]

Posted by Roque Strew in hip hop on Mon: 08-21-06: 10:30 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cee-Lo
"Ophidiophobia (Snakes on a Plane)"
[2006]
★★★

So there's this movie out called *Snakes on a Plane*, starring Samuel L. Jackson-- perhaps you've heard of it?-- and it contains a scene in which Jackson says the line, "I'm tired of these motherfucking snakes on this motherfucking plane!" The line was voted into the film by the internet-- after filming was completed-- as a collective expression of the informed public's growing skepticism of the War on Terror. Or the public's love of Samuel L. Jackson saying, "motherfucking." Either one.

Listening to "Ophidiophobia", I am reminded of Queen's "One Vision" from the soundtrack to 1986's *Iron Eagle*. In that film, it was Louis Gossett, Jr., the hardassed drill sergeant from *An Officer and a Gentleman*, who saved us from evil, and Freddie Mercury who willed him, and us, through song. "One flesh, one bone/ One true religion/ One voice, one hope/ One real decision," Mercury sang, "Wowowowowo, gimme one vision." Cee-Lo, though more specific and personal, sings of the same unity and bravery, "I feel like a helpless child/ As I pace the aisle/ It's too bad to be true/ Or maybe I could help/ I'd fly this plane myself/ It's the least I can do."

The least Organized Noize could do was craft a funky snakecharming beat for Cee-Lo. The production team behind most of the classic material from Outkast and Cee's own Goodie Mob provides an uptempo, electric guitar driven track that links their work circa *Aquemini* with Danger Mouse's recent global domination with Cee-Lo on the Gnarls Barkley project. While it may not reach the heights of their best work together, Organized Noize and Cee-Lo certainly do enough here to get this motherfucking ass out of this motherfucking seat.

Posted by Peter Macia in r&b on Mon: 08-21-06: 07:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Electric Six
"I Buy the Drugs"
[2006]
★★

First Andrew W.K.'s "Pushing Drugs", now another over-the-top rock act's purchasing them. What next, OK Go starts a meth lab? Seriously though, at least the Electric Six's released a single without the words "fire" or "dance" in the title. Rather than hawking arsony or cutting a rug, Dick Valentine strictly channels Jack Black here, delivering a braggadocious monologue of his swingin' junkie lifestyle.

Over a slightly out-of-tune piano line, Valentine waxes lyrical about his illicit hobby, swelling with pride into an intentionally clumsy breakdown: "Send in a self-addressed stamped envelope to/ P.O. Box 900 Los Angeles, CA/ 90212/ And I will fill your prescription with some degree of accuracy/ Then I'll send it back to you." Unfortunately, the rest of the band's equally diarrhetic approach doesn't come across as so funny, leaving the song pretty unmemorable with its glam yet garden variety power chords and piano riffs. Valentine may deliver the punchline, but no one's warming up the crowd.

Electric Six MySpace: http://www.myspace.com/electricsixmusic
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Mon: 08-21-06: 07:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Wee DJs
"Breathe"
[2006]
★★★★
Wee DJs aren't a Scottish duo. They're an alias for individual-Scottish-person Dave Being, and play dark, industrial-stained electro. This track (the first on their most recent full-length, *Fear and Lothian*) is aggressive and sharp, but just digi-messy enough to blur the fine-precision gears in the drums. The chemical-cloud of synth that Being uses for a melody carries a numbing, foreboding effect, like being tapped on the ear with a warm, fluffy cube of steel. When I first heard the track, it reminded me in spirit of old Autechre, maybe because of the messy/mechanized quality, but now seems closer to Art of Noise with, uh, more noize (and minus the Pop Sensibility). In any case, I really don't see how this could hurt a party: If anyone complains about the bass, just remind them that we play music louder these days.
Posted by Dominique Leone in electro house on Mon: 08-21-06: 07:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Walkmen The Walkmen
"Many Rivers to Cross"
[2006]
★★
Harry Nilsson's vocal cords were famously shot when he recorded *Pussy Cats* with friend and patron John Lennon, but I've never understood why they opened the record with the most glaring example: His hoarse rendition of Jimmy Cliff's "Many Rivers to Cross" pissed all over the grace of the original like a homeless veteran holding a sign saying "Will Sully Classics 4 Food." It's no surprise that the Walkmen painstakingly recreate the boozy sentimentality of Nilsson's version, from the lush bed of strings to Nilsson's fuck-all scream in the song's final moments. Such a carbon copy is worth a double take and a triple-check of your ID3 tags, but there's something more disconcerting about their uncanny karaoke.

No band out there turns not giving a shit into such craft, and when they're going for broke for one perfect musical moment (like, say, the horns in "Louisiana"), it's something I admire. But when they're romanticizing someone else's dark days, I'm ready to snatch the Brandy Alexanders from their hands (though that title from their last record-- *A Hundred Miles Off*-- was likely one more tip of the hat to Nilsson). There's no bravery in recreating something tragic, even if that approach suits the Walkmen better than anyone, and no risk taken in gravelling up your voice to imitate Nilsson on a bad day; it's just farce.

Stream: The Walkmen: Many Rivers to Cross
Posted by Jason Crock in indie rock on Fri: 08-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Memphis Memphis
"Incredibly Drunk on Whiskey"
[2006]
★★★

Drinking songs, for obvious reasons, tend to be sloppy and rude, sonic replications of the alcohol experience. Such inebriated territory would therefore seem to be antithetical to Stars' Torquil Campbell-- whose songs are usually marked by prim pronunciation and delicate arrangements. True to form, "Incredibly Drunk on Whiskey",

a song from his Amy Millan-less side project Memphis' forthcoming *A Little Place in the Wilderness*, may be the most polite, sober song ever written about going on a bender. Built on a jaunty jazz beat and merry clarinet, the only tipoff that Campbell might be tipsy is the chorus, which is overstuffed with words in such a way to make the song an awkwardly catchy valentine to mutual liver damage.

Posted by Rob Mitchum in indie pop on Fri: 08-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Portastatic
“I'm in Love (With Arthur Dove)”
[2006]
★★★★
If the indie-kid version of songmeanings.net ever goes live, expect this three-and-a-half-minute Mac McCaughan gem to be in the most-viewed column. For one, it's probably the most disgustingly catchy thing the Superchunk and Merge Records co-founder has ever recorded, high-fructose taffy flavored with a purposefully overdone arena rock hook and no-nonsense verses nailing it down in doubletime. A handful of guitars, drums, bass, and keyboards comprise this perfect sing-a-long for people who like to stumble through their verses.

But it's the content that will nab web readers: "I'm in love with Arthur Dove," sings McCaughan, a guy that has spent nearly two decades singing about slack motherfuckers, cursed mirrors, and smarter hearts suddenly refraining about Arthur Dove, a six-decades-dead artist who became the first abstract American painter by curving nature's edges and dimming her colors. McCaughan wraps Dove in parable paint, explaining that he's just not ready to commit to the maturity of science and reason quite yet. Oh, yeah? Then why does this stick like proteoglycan?

Posted by Grayson Currin in indie rock on Fri: 08-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Knife The Knife
“Marble House (Rex The Dog Remix)”
[2006]
★★★½
As active pop remixers go, Rex the Dog falls squarely on the side of "workmanlike and dependable," which is a polite way of saying he makes up for his lack of imagination and recontextual prowess (for that, consult the mighty Jacques Lu Cont) with a solid ear for pop structure and a good instinct for knowing when to stay hands-off. That means when his source material is strong enough he barely has to do anything at all; as with his remix of the Knife's "Heartbeats", for which he played the role of no-frills dancefloor translator, this "Marble House" recut finds him nudging up the bpms, fortifying the rhythms, fussing about with a couple extra synth leads, and...not much else. Thing is, you can dance to this now, and it turns out it sounds pretty mega at mach speed, so I guess that makes RTD kinda like one of those re-decorators who can totally transform a room by painting it three shades darker and moving a chair-- you just shrug, pay up, and enjoy.
Posted by Mark Pytlik in electro pop on Thu: 08-17-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Audion / Ellen Allien A-Side: Audion
“Just a Man (Ellen Allien Version)”
B-Side: Ellen Allien
“Just a Woman”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★★
B-Side: ★★★★
Audion (Matthew Dear) and Ellen Allien team up for this 12" backscratcher on Spectral, each contributing a new track and a reworking of the other's track, and both sound good here. Especially strong are their remixes of each other: Audion's take on Allien's "Just a Woman" is spooky, with deep, burnt drums laying down trance like they want to stare you down, under this repeating, clav-y synth motive. Likewise, Allien's version of Audion's "Just a Man" uses the creepo-synth line, but here behind soft, bouncy clip beats-- but where Audion's original was blunt and hypnotic, Allien's is a little cute. Her "Just a Woman" original, on the other hand, is pretty great: beats that

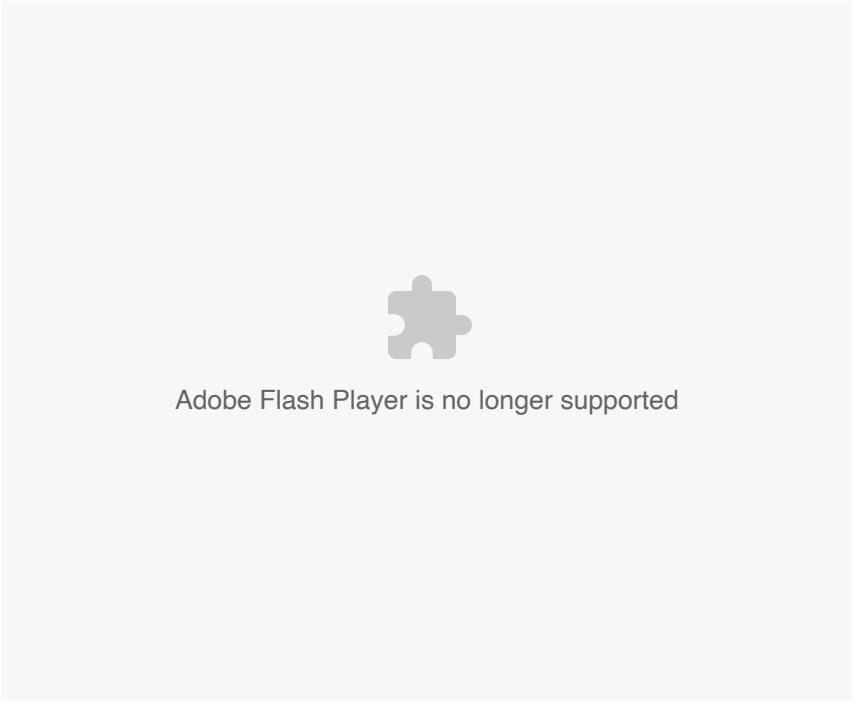
pop like a hundred light bulbs in sequence, and a synth melody harmonized exactly an octave and a half-step apart, thereby destroying tonality completely. It's bleak but aggressive, and not "just" anything.
Posted by Dominique Leone in electronic on Thu: 08-17-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Linda Ronstadt with Ann Savoy
“Walk Away Renee”
[Vanguard; 2006]
★★

Linda Ronstadt sings this high-lonesome take on the Left Banke's signature hit with Cajun music singer/chronicler Ann Savoy (the Savoy-Doucet Band and Magnolia Sisters), but the results aren't as intriguing as they should be. With Ronstadt sounding more restrained than on previous collaborations with Emmylou Harris and Dolly Parton-- or even Aaron Neville, which is saying a lot-- this cover strips the song down to its barest elements, finds the harmonic possibilities in the melody, and inadvertently makes it safe for Starbucks worldwide. Instead of capturing the mod melancholy of the original or infusing it with any of the rhythmic complexity found elsewhere on their album *Adieu False Heart*, Ronstadt and Savoy emphasize refined harmonies that are both too precise and too tasteful to be very interesting. What this song needs, it seems, is a harpsichord.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in AOR on Thu: 08-17-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ciara Ciara
“Get Up [ft. Chamillionaire]”
[2006]
★★★



Well, you can never accuse Ciara of showing off. Her vocals, best described as heavy breathing with occasional undulating tuts, are either about restraint or lack of range. But the girl's technique is flawless, she never reaches for melisma when it isn't necessary, and irritant/svengali Jazze Pha has a knack for placing her jagged rhythmic tones on top of jumpy 808 cotton candy. "Get Up" is no great progression, but it's refined and the tension in her voice implies a clearly coached delivery, the sort of thing that requires numerous takes-- she's no one-shot Betty. Chamillionaire's sing-songy (shocker!) verse is triple-tracked, making the H-town lizard sound like a lean Darth Vader. Thing is, Cham might be a better singer than Ciara. After his crisp ca$h flow, he moves into a breezy bridge: "You know Chamillionaire stay on the grind/ A hustler like me is hard to find/ I ain't really impressed, yes/ Unless it's about some dollar siiiigh-ns." Maybe he should get in the studio with Jam & Lewis.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in r&b on Wed: 08-16-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Melee Beats
“Distraction”
[2006]
★★★½

Demerit points for the so-lovingly-rendered-it's-almost-plagiaristic *homage* to the deep thuds and carnivalesque whirlygigging of Daft Punk's "Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger", but if you can get past that, "Distraction" is actually a pretty wonderful slice of disco house. As the cringingly-named Melee Beats, fledgling Sacramento-based producer Nic Bertino makes French house from his American bedroom. There's good reason that sounds like a bad idea, but the 20-year-old Bertino's (junior) boyish vocals and considerable maximalist production chops say otherwise. "Distraction"'s chockers with sweep filters, slap funk basslines, and wheezy vocodered vocals, so it's obvious that Bertino's Daft Punk man-love runs far deeper than the obvious "Harder, Better" connects, but, know what? There are worse bands to sound a lot like, especially at only 20.

Stream: Melee Beats: Distraction

Posted by Mark Pytlik in house on Wed: 08-16-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

John Mayer
“Waiting on the World to Change”
[2006]
½

"Waiting on the World to Change" is the sequel to John Mayer's "Your Body Is a Wonderland", replacing the politics of the flesh with, well, politics. Preaching the gospel of non-action and civic apathy, the song has the gravitas of an infomercial but only a fraction of the soul, pairing, for example, a half-hearted impulse "to bring our neighbors home from war" with adult-contemporary horn samples is just one instance. But who needs soul when you can have...*soulfulness*? That drum groove, a sort of anesthetic ?uestlove parody, could soundtrack a root canal. And who needs rebellion when you can have rebelliousness? Mayer actually mentions "the system," bro. This is his fainéant fiat to the ultimate-frisbee set: Leave agitation to the other dudes and text me later. In the meantime, you get feel-good Hammond licks, some sweet handclaps, a glockenspiel, and "when you trust your television/ What you get is what you got," which might be a koan. So *this* is how you corrupt the youth.

Posted by Roque Strew in pop on Wed: 08-16-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Andrew W.K.
“You Will Remember Tonight”
[2006]
★★★★½

Close Calls With Brick Walls is Andrew W.K.'s "weird" album, the one where he finally indulges his Zappa complex and lets his roots in the Midwestern noise scene show, and that's probably why it isn't coming out in the U.S. But even when he tries to get experimental, Your Friend can't help but whip out ridiculously epic stadium-stompers about the transformative power of music. Even with the multitracked guitar-squall freakout that ends the song, this one is huge, a fist-pumping pileup of Meat Loaf pianos and whiplash guitars. It's all chorus, no verse, and it's the sort of hedonistic call-to-arms that everyone thought he'd never write again after *The Wolf*. And all of a sudden, it comes roaring back: the balcony dives, the stages jammed with revelers, the sweat condensing on club ceilings in provincial cities. Some of us always loved this dude.

Posted by Tom Breihan in rawk on Tue: 08-15-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A Sunny Day in Glasgow
“C'mon”
[2006]
★★★★

Philadelphia-based A Sunny Day in Glasgow is King Kong Ding Dong's Ben Daniels and his two sisters, Robin and Lauren. For a shoegazer, Brother Daniels sure likes looking at the sky: band name, EP title, and another track ("The Best Summer Ever") all reference sunshine or the seasons. While that track is fuzzed-out carpark power pop, "C'mon" steals its reverb and makes *that* the song: gnarled guitar strings bend out of place while the

Daniels sisters chant in rounds, "Be afraid of ghosts are, really." They sing the odd line in pretty little arpeggios, their sugary voices dipping in and out of the strings-- nevermind that *they're* the ghosts they warned us about, soon erupting into a haunted chorus of "ah-ah-ah-ah." Close to the end of "C'mon", their warning turns into command, and the song's layers get too thick and impenetrable. Like Grizzly Bear, ASDIG's got a steep pop-to-noise curve, so their most gorgeous melodies become thick and swampy before you've noticed the tide has come in. Even the brightest colors look black if you smear them all together.

Stream: A Sunny Day in Glasgow: C'mon

Posted by Jessica Suarez in dream pop on Tue: 08-15-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Coolio Coolio

"Gangsta Walk [ft. Snoop Dogg]"

[2006]

★½

Hey, it's Coolio! After spending more time in TV studios than recording studios, he's coming back to the U.S. of A. straight out of Das Boot (erm, Italy). But this ain't no fantastic voyage return trip. On this track, Mr. Artis Leon Ivey, Jr. is dropping his stank-ass nuts on your chin and his stank-ass rhymes on your unmentionables like, um, nuts on your chin: "I hope your mouth ain't runny, nigga/ 'Cause if it is, your body's gonna hop like a bunny, nigga." Thank pop paisan Vanni G for the Dre-lite production that lends Coolio's Tuffskin talk about being "Old Man River" a Teletubby vibe. (Old Man River because "you're going straight to the bottom," see. Better recognize.) And thank a paycheck for Snoop Dogg's same-old same-old at the mic. It's a toss-up between what's worse: The pumps-and-a-bump Coolio trying too hard to puff out his chest, or the barely-there Snoop making his Crip pitch while on the way to a "Girls Gone Wild" shoot. Either way, someone needs to do a solid and take a lead pipe to this thing asap.

Posted by David Raposa in hip hop on Tue: 08-15-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Sparklehorse Sparklehorse

"Don't Take My Sunshine Away"

[2006]

★★★★

Just as Sparklehorse's previous album, *It's a Wonderful Life*, shook up the Jimmy Stewart flick like a snowglobe, their new song uses another familiar cultural touchstone, "You Are My Sunshine", as its starting point-- specifically the last line of its chorus. In Mark Linkous' hands, though, the original's undauntedly upbeat revelry becomes a desperate cry of devotion and a plea for continued happiness. It starts with a flurry of sweetly skewed similes: "Your smile is like the sun sinking into the ocean," Mark Linkous sings. "Your face is like watching flowers grow in fast motion." But the Beach Boy harmonies on the chorus sound like the ultimate downers, and Linkous' signature fuzzy-filtered vocals exude vulnerability. In pleading for happiness, the song also recognizes its precariousness, which makes the abrupt ending all the more poignant. Coming from the musician who made the exquisitely self-destructive *Good Morning Spider*, this epiphany gives the song considerable force even beyond its musical elements.

Stream: Sparklehorse: Don't Take My Sunshine Away

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie rock on Mon: 08-14-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

120 Days 120 Days

"Come Out (Come Down, Fade Out, Be Gone)"

[2006]

★★★★½

For once, why don't we elide the obvious-- in this case, Norwegian band and recent Vice signees 120 Days' superficial resemblance to certain electro-and-Krautrock forebears-- and experience "Come Out (Come Down, Fade Out, Be Gone)" as a first-order phenomenon, with its own heat and light. A lopsided parabola than spans nine tautly thrumming minutes, "Come Out" is a marvel of ethereal precision, immaculate pacing, Teutonic austerity, trance-inducing miasma, and dark euphoria. A supple motorik cadence and concentrated volleys of staccato bass inscribe concise glyphs on the air; iridescent analog synths leave ghostly phosphene trails; sine-wave guitars and judiciously deployed yet emphatic vocals push the rhythmic urgency into the steam-gouting red

zone. There's a lot of song here, but no excess-- each strand is counterbalanced by another, so "Come Out" holds its perilous spin around a stable axis, twisting methodically skyward until, finally escaping gravity, it soars.

Stream: 120 Days: Come Out (Come Down, Fade Out, Be Gone)

Posted by Brian Howe in indie rock on Mon: 08-14-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

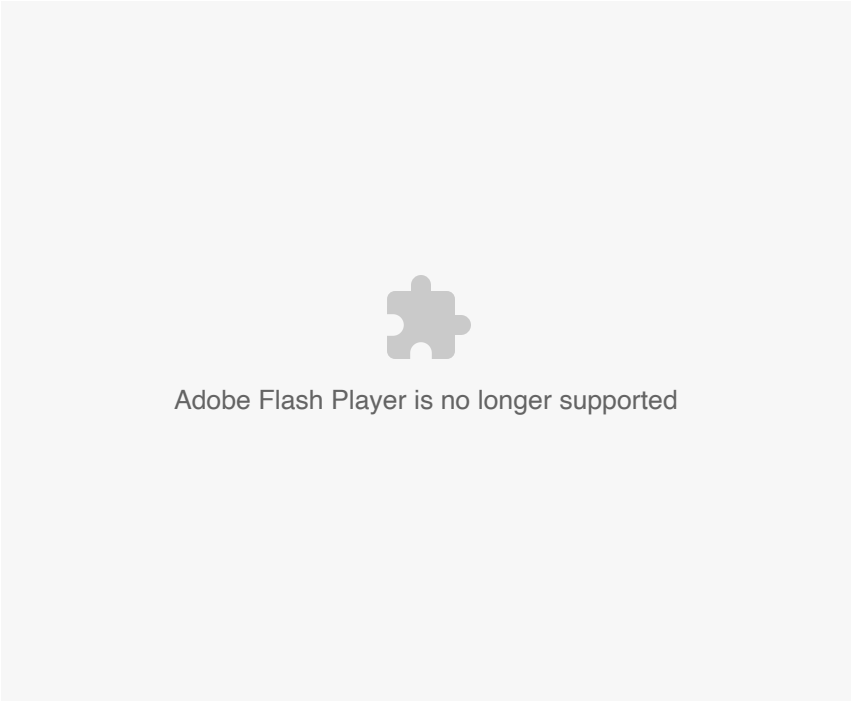
Field Music Field Music
"In Context"
[2006]
★★★★

Indie rock meat meets indie rock potatoes with a violin garnish on Field Music's new single "In Context". Pretty much the entire past ten indie years is somewhere on this song-- everydude verse vocals, chorus harmonies, a bassline with no sustain whatsoever, dry interlocking guitars, neo-new wave drums, and post-rock guitar uproar. The tune has a reactive structure, with the guitars breaking out in fits of melody after every short vocal phrase; both the verses and chorus are constructed on a set of short lines followed by gaps for instrumental action. The best vocal/instrumental couplet comes in the second verse, when instead of the usual fast, cascading guitar line after Andrew Moore sings "I was expecting a change," we get this slow, repeating violin phrase supported by chiming guitar. It's an intriguing blend of pop and post-rock dynamics, and if Field Music can keep making that blend this memorable, they may yet escape the shadow of fellow Sunderlanders the Futureheads.

Stream: Field Music: In Context

Posted by Joe Tangari in indie rock on Mon: 08-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Robin Thicke Robin Thicke
"Wanna Love U Girl (Remix) [ft. Busta Rhymes & Pharrell]"
[2006]
★★★



It's still surprising that Pharrell didn't keep the "Wanna Love U Girl" beat for himself, a lightfooted Neptunes joint with cascading synths and shakers that invoke falsettos and Miami (or perhaps that's just the video for the original version, which features all manner of Jet Ski and Hype Williams' present split-screen obsession). But P fancies himself a rapper, financing his "Willy Wonka decor" by hawking loads of blue-eyed soul, and with Robin Thicke playing urbane crooner-seducer on the airy high range with dedicated portions of soul gusto, finally Justin Timberlake can go be Peaches in peace (see: "SexyBack" aka "Sexy Jus Died").

Thicke's vibrato game is locked (per "Shooter", his heavy-ro collabo with BFF Lil Wayne), but on "Wanna Love U Girl" he simplifies, perhaps too distracted by the "Girl" in question for fanciful vocal tricks, leveling his love

letter like a hot promise: "When she's around nothing else matters/ Untouchable, she's got her own forcefield/ Wanna love you girl/ Wanna love you/ Oooh." Unfortunately, Busta Rhymes, allegedly enamored of Thicke's voice after hearing "Love U" in a Miami club, jumped on the remix and used it as an opportunity to romance a girl while airing out his ex, which not only garners him no play, but lightens Thicke's devotion load. But you know, it's a way to milk out an aging lead single until the album drops.

Posted by Julianne Shepherd in r&b on Mon: 08-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dirty Projectors Dirty Projectors
“Katy at the Mall, Pts. 1 & 2”
[2006]
★★★

As some of their most vivid material is preoccupied with pigeons and parking lots, nothing excites the Dirty Projectors quite like the mundane, so it's no surprise that a two-part track titled "Katy at the Mall" is a highlight of their *New Attitude* EP. The tune begins with some off-time strumming and Dave Longstreth's distinctive croon, which opens with one simple, gray statement: "Katy knows where the mall is, and she goes to the mall on the days when it snows." This is before the multi-tracked caterwauling, the cold electric tones of a hearing test, and the canned dance beats kick in one after another. Then arrives the second part of the brief song, featuring another band entirely, with clipped flashdance keyboards and triangle samples bolstering a female lead vocal, who closely impersonates Longstreth on the very same phrase. I don't need to call it an unexpected turn, but it does transform a celebration of a prosaic detail into something that actually sounds like (at least their own version of) a bona fide celebration-- interesting, then, that Longstreth needs someone to sub for him to get there.
Posted by Jason Crock in avant pop on Mon: 08-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

I'm From Barcelona I'm From Barcelona
“We're From Barcelona”
[2006]
★★★★★

Adobe Flash Player is no longer supported

First things first: No, they're not, but you have to admit that the trochaic bounce of "Barcelona" rolls off the tongue more sweetly than "Jönköping," and rolling sweetly is this Swedish pansy-pop ensemble's bread-and-Kaviar-fish-paste. Like Barthelme's Paraguay, theirs is not the Barcelona that exists on maps. In this Barcelona, sun-kissed guitars and punchy horns double the melodic potency of fresh-faced "tra-la-la"s, and a song needs no more occasion than its possibility: "I'm gonna sing this song with all of my friends/ And we're I'm From Barcelona." In this Barcelona, the meta-conceit comes off less pomo than just honest, couched in such a

sumptuous lilt and fueled by mutual adoration. In this Barcelona, cute girls euphorically harmonize with relatively heinous boys in kitschy cardigans and balding mullets, while just off camera, someone with a horrible mustache is saying "watch the birdie." (No, really-- peep the video.)

Posted by Brian Howe in indie pop on Fri: 08-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Legends A-Side: The Legends
“Lucky Star”
B-Side: The Legends
“This Heart's Not Made of Stone”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★½
B-Side: ★★★

That Madonna reference in the title is no accident. Johan Angergård has studied Jellybean Benitez's production style for the Legends' new single, but fortunately, he hasn't copied it. The synths percolate perkily, the drum machine rides that hi-hat button for a slightly anachronistic mirrorball beat, and a cartoon "ah-ah-ah" melody pervades nearly every second of the song. That motif is just this side of annoying, which may be the point: After the very disappointing *Public Radio* (boy, that 3.8 was the hardest rating I've ever had to give), Angergård's feeling lucky enough to risk it all. Drum roll: it pays off.

He's also feeling lucky enough to include as a B-side that may or may not be a rewrite of "This Heart Is a Stone", by his other band Acid House Kings. Wordier but less lyrically clever than its predecessor, "This Heart's Not Made of Stone" is an obvious throwback to the Legends' 1960s-leaning debut, *Up Against the Legends*. Wrapped up in Angergård's gauzy production, the song is a studious mix of post-punk drum machine with pre-punk organ and guitar, swirling around a cliff-diving chorus. But even as he hits one of his most melancholic hooks, Angerald still gets upstaged by the tambourine, which owns this song.

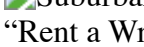
MP3: The Legends: Lucky Star
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Fri: 08-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Photo by Mikael K. Jansson Hello Saferide
“The Quiz”
[2006]
★★★½

Adobe Flash Player is no longer supported

Cuteness alert!!! "Can you sleep when I grind my teeth?" chirps Hello Saferide's Annika Norlin, who has the kind of idiosyncratic voice frequently praised in indie guys but less common among girls. Norlin has plenty of summery, upbeat twee stuff, but "The Quiz" (from her latest EP with the too-cute title *Would You Let Me Play This EP Ten Times a Day*) is all vulnerable, dorm-room acoustic guitar and handclaps straight outta Mr. Big's "To Be With You"-- and this somehow gives me a huge case of the warm-fuzzies. She breathes witty life into all those tiny but important early-relationship question marks that people, particularly self-conscious indie people, rarely put into song: Is he clean? Does he listen to the right records ("Townes and Jens with a hint of Ricky Lee")? Does he really like sci-fi that much? Will I have to look at his feet? It's over in two minutes, but first Norlin flips the tone to sneak in something more important: "If I fall, will you pick me up?" Um, yes?

MP3: Hello Saferide: The Quiz
Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Fri: 08-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Suburban Kids With Biblical Names Suburban Kids With Biblical Names
“Rent a Wreck”
[2005]
★★★½

Adobe Flash Player is no longer supported

The funniest thing about Swedish duo Suburban Kids With Biblical Names-- just picked up by Minty Fresh in the U.S.-- is they're totally not joking when they sing, in *Napoleon Dynamite* deadpan, "I wanna turn all their dance floors into a burning inferno of ba-ba-ba." If now-dead Death From Above 1979 merged Rapture dance punk and Lightning Bolt spazz-core, then Suburban Kids' Johan Hedberg and Peter Gunnarsson drop the spazz and maybe some of the punk but definitely turn up the twee, which is pretty much the punkest thing around anymore, anyway. Music-box piano and a nursery rhyme melody get into a bareknuckle circulation-desk brawl with distorted guitar stabs and disco hi-hat-- and the pale guys go "ba-ba-ba" (true to their word). OK, so it's basically just another touring song, but maybe they'll give us their tots before we replace all the "Vote for Pedro" t-shirts with "Sore Loserman 2006."

MP3: Suburban Kids With Biblical Names: Rent a Wreck
Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Fri: 08-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

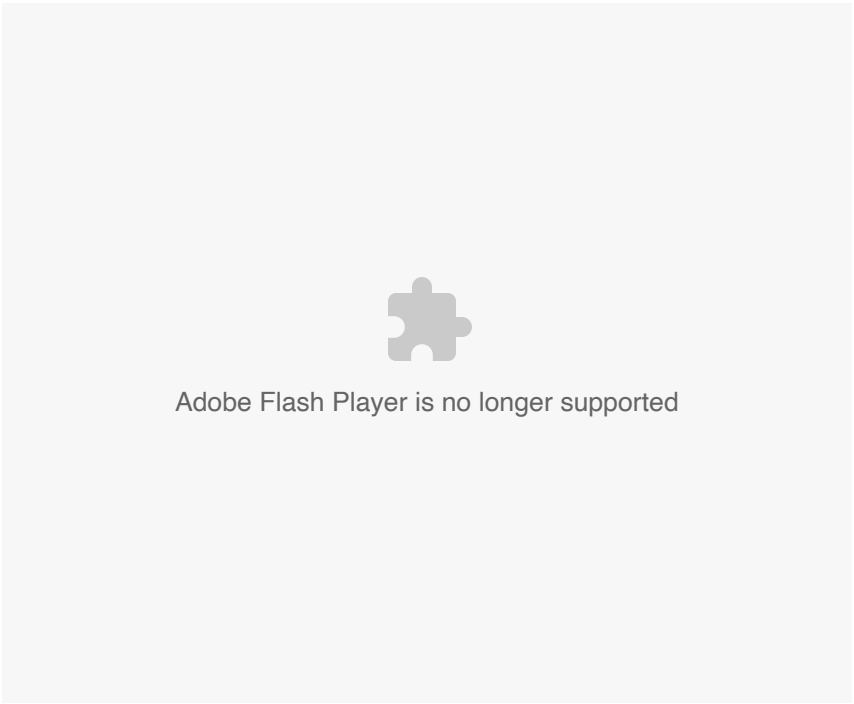
Firefox AK Firefox AK
“What's That Sound”
[2006]
★★★★

Adobe Flash Player is no longer supported

This deceptively simple electro pop ditty is actually a storysong. Singer Andrea Kellerman recounts meeting a man with an achingly hypnotic voice-- "no light, no dark, no high or low"-- and long after they've said goodbye, "it still rings in my ears," leaving her pondering the titular question. "What's That Sound" possesses a striking carnality: Kellerman's performance, which finds her perfectly poised and just as surprised as anyone else, suggests the effect of the encountered voice is purely physical. Although she could easily trust listeners to infer its effect, instead she shows us: Those pauses between the words "the sound of his voice" convey a sublime sensuality, a desperate breathlessness reflected in the song's immediate momentum and synth melodies. That sound is a million indie hearts bursting on first listen.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Fri: 08-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fergie Fergie
“London Bridge”
[2006]
★★



Oh snap! I am not trying to hear Black Eyed Peas' Stacy "Fergie" Ferguson re-popularize retro-rap slang from Biz Markie circa 1989 and shamelessly jack flow *estilo* from Shawnna's "Gettin' Some" and Missy Elliott's "On & On", minus the bold, empowered, or interesting aspects of either. Of course, Fergie's a true chamillionaire, one who helped the BEPs hawk platinum mono-thoughts to corporate ad sales departments by imitating whatever superdiva is the superdiva-est at the moment (her 2005 title: "Broke-Ass Beyoncé"), so the vulgar swagger-jack of "London Bridge" comes with little shock.

But if you eat enough cheddar cheese puffs, you're gonna chuck at some point. And so, not long after she pukily infantilized breasts in "My Humps", Fergie deploys the term "London Bridge" as a preschool metaphor for "I'm hot," extols her Grey Goose goggles, and coos, "I'm such a lady but I'm dancing like a ho." The only response I can muster is another old-school rap cliché, this one courtesy Ice Cube circa '93: "Check yo self," 'cause that shit is coming dangerously close to wrecking.

Even more nauseating is the video, for which she joins the ranks of bougie white women backed up by women of ethnic subculture X (see: Harajuku Girls): motive unknown, self-awareness unsuspected. In "London", two Latina-looking *cholas* with pompadours pop by Impala trunks, while Ferg emerges from a limo in a chiffon mini-dress. Then there's producer Polow Da Don, who adds another formidable underthing to his résumé, his four-alarm fire jernts on a jacking horn section. It's a higher-profile appearance than his Rich Boy beats ("Throw Some D's") or that amazing Mya rhythm ["Fallen (Zone 4 Remix)"], yet one wonders if the visibility is worth it when the vocal track is so offensively lame. Listen, just call me when the instrumental hits the net with different vocals. I'll be praying to La Virgen that Fergie does not try to "top" this.

Posted by Julianne Shepherd in pop on Thu: 08-10-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Snoop Dogg Snoop Dogg
"Vato [ft. B-Real]"
[2006]
★★★
Oh, cultural recombination! Leaning on the same gothic cathedral grind that they used for Rosco P. Coldchain's "Only God Can Judge Me", the Neptunes hit Snoop with something medium-flavored for the street single from his new, likely-boring album, *Blue Carpet Treatment*. It's a good groove for Snoop, who's humped trends so many times, he ought to be eyeing bluegrass sometime soon. Of course, on the Latin-themed "Vato" (that's "homeboy" in English, gringos), Cypress Hill's B-Real gets the mothballs shaken off and spits a love-him-or-hate-him chorus that actually tells a story. It's been a minute since Snoop got caught up in narrative, but this is a

surprisingly coherent tale about accidental gunplay. And B-Real, though playing up his "ese" flow, sounds fresher than any MC with the kind of miles he's got on 'em has any right to. Snoop can barely keep up, which, considering his lyrics sheets lately, isn't all that shocking. Look for the shitty reggaeton remix very soon.

MP3: Snoop Dogg: Vato [ft. B-Real]

Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Thu: 08-10-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Killer Mike Killer Mike
"That's Life"
[2006]
★★★★★

Crackers, backpackers, whatever-- relentless fire-breathing transcends such sub-genre squabbles. To wit, all else quickly becomes moot once this monster begins his head-boiling barrage-- but instead of going on about purple tops or double barreled bang-bangetry, Mike is chopping it up with Cornel West and Michael Eric Dyson and "servicing the motherfuckin' children." You can practically see the steam spouting from his brain.

Channeling Ice Cube's vintage 1991 flow, Mike manages to chew out Bush (I, II, and Barb), Oprah, Cosby, doctors, Bill O'Reilly, preachers, Martha Stewart, and "rich motherfuckers black and white." He even clears up the brotherhood of the baggy pants myth in one of the track's searing between-verse screaming-word diatribes that contain as much-- if not more-- venom as its rhymes. So, yeah, he's angry. But, somehow, still optimistic; he's not about to roll himself up in a big ball and die. Instead, even after checking off his infinite shit list, he reverses the titular self-defeating shoulder shrug: "If you don't like what I'm sayin'…*that's life*!" You're either with him or you're a greedy multi-millionaire pedophile crackhead slut with no regard for the human race, fuckface.

MP3: Killer Mike: That's Life

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Thu: 08-10-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pussycat Dolls The Pussycat Dolls
"Buttons"
[2006]
★★★½

So we're late to this one. Very late. It's funny when the pop cycle eludes us, if for a moment, letting something that reeks of retread occupy that nook in our brains reserved for only the most "respectable" art. "Buttons" is clearly recycled garbage-- a crumpled piece of Truth Hurts-style Indian swell, janky Timbo-lite drums, chink-chinking zils (finger cymbals), and stray cat vocals that seem more interested in sounding aggressive than being ferocious-- but somehow through the composed obviousness of producer Polow Da Don's synthetic stomp, it works.

Now that the image of lead rag Doll Nicole Scherzinger sashaying toward us is etched in said nook courtesy of this video's constant rotation on MTV (it's this and Rihanna all morning at Chez Fennessey), we're prepared to succumb to the swirly mixed metaphors entrenched therein. Though it's been noted that the outfits the Dolls rock rarely feature actual buttons, there's a second tier to their cooing that might be deeper than was intended, that being the buttons we push in romantic relationships and the bedroom. The rest of that theory need not be explained-- this is a group made up of pseudo-strippers, after all.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in pop on Thu: 08-10-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bricolage Bricolage
"Footsteps"
[2006]
★★

I guess I'm just a little too sensitive (sorry, Orange Juice). At least I'm not the only one who owes the Scottish indie pop progenitors an apology. This debut single by their countrymen Bricolage obsessively replicates the nimble rhythm guitar, chiming leads, and mournful self-pity of uptempo Postcard-era Orange Juice singles like

"Falling and Laughing" or "Love Sick". Except Darren Cameron's bass doesn't quite match David McClymont's blue-eyed funk, and Wallace Meek-- the one doing the Edwyn Collins impression-- is moaning awkwardly about girls "giving you the shoulder" (hipper than "cold shoulder", or the only cliché that would fit?) and, sweet Jesus Lloyd Webber, a "Technicolor coat".

Franz Ferdinand like them, and Bricolage namedrop "Take Me Out" on the flip, so maybe the Glaswegian popsters are just swapping blogrolls. "What have you got into this time?" Meek repeats right where an awesome chorus should swoop in, but as a consolation prize Bricolage return straightaway to their next fakebook verse. Apologies to the archduke: You've had it better. Like, so much.

Stream: Bricolage: Footsteps
Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Thu: 08-10-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Field
“Over the Ice”
[2006]
★★★★
Anyone who's ever lost an afternoon playing with a loop editor should understand where the Field is coming from. Set a couple seconds of sound on an endless cycle, and something hypnotic happens, some near-physical, near-autistic immersion in every detail of every repetition-- soon enough, you're buying the Oval back catalog. Sweden's Axel Willner has made a strange science of this on his Kompakt singles, crafting tranced-out, ambient dance music from repeats that hang and shimmer forever, only occasionally stumbling sideways into some *different* infinite repeats.

The new *Sun & Ice* 12" complicates things, pulling those loops and cycles into actual patterns, and making those patterns play off one another into larger shapes, like a techno version of Colleen's *The Golden Morning Breaks*. It's the cerebral hum of "Over the Ice" that'll make waves-- the airy tail-ends of chords spin around while little micro-second snippets of voice stutter like a skipping CD, together making an ocean over a hushed boom-tick beat. (You know from the start that no snare will ever join in.) As Willner draws tension out of his slow chord changes and folds in flickering synthesizers, you can't help but start imagining the title literally: Suddenly you're snowblind and trudging across the world's biggest, brightest ice floe.

Stream: The Field: Over the Ice
Posted by Nitsuh Abebe in electronic on Wed: 08-09-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Oh No
“Black [ft. Wise Intelligent]”
[2006]
★★★★
Funny, in 1990 Poor Righteous Teachers' catchy conscious rap had me drawing Nation of Islam emblems on my Trapper Keeper. PRT's lead rapper, Wise Intelligent, was a pint-sized fireball who toasted in a froggy Jersey patois that was irresistable. It was groups like PRT, Brand Nubian, Paris, YZ, Divine Styler, et al. that got me to read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and call my dad a "white devil." Not quite the same as, "I'm going down to the trap, Mom...Yes, Kevin's house," but whatever. If you want the story of what's changed since then, read Jeff Chang.

Songs like "Black" just don't come around much anymore. Wise Intelligent is a lot angrier than he used to be, simultaneously calling out and channeling the curmudgeony Bill Cosby in his vitriolic rhymes. It's not an indictment of new rap, though; It's a reminder that the tales it tells are based on true stories. Oh No drops different "black" samples to fill Wise's lines, "[Black] bodies fill the prisons, the cemeteries, and the soup kitchens/ Politicians make it clear being [black] is a fuckin' problem/ Crackers play me like I'm 'bout to rob 'em"-- and that's just part of the hook. The verses are a stream of "we"s and "I"s that are a marked difference from the fingerpointing of most alternative rap these days, and it's refreshing to hear anyone talk about what's wrong in the Black community, not just the hip hop community.

For his part, Oh No is sampling old Galt MacDermot exclusively these days, chopping his fusion funk into Oxnard bounce in much the same way his brother Madlib does. "Black" bristles with energy, layering bits of jumpy organ, a trembling sax, and echoing claps into a pumping, anthemic headnodder that adds snap to Wise's jabs.

Stream: Oh No: Black [ft. Wise Intelligent]
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Wed: 08-09-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Swan Lake Swan Lake
"All Fires"
[2006]
★★★½
It's hard to imagine a more humble track to initiate the world's relationship with Swan Lake, the three-piece Canadian fantasy combining Destroyer and Pornographer Dan Bejar, Frog Eyes caterwauler Carey Mercer, and Sunset Rubdown/Wolf Parade howler Spencer Krug. Everything's so simple, Krug navigating the story of half a town drowning for the love of a beauty named Teresa, five chords washing like waves from an acoustic guitar. Reverb and tremolo guitars slink and twinkle. A high-pitched keyboard navigates the melody for the song's backstretch. It's a slow, modest pop song, little more.

Is it, though? Actually, any other introduction would be too much. Here's enough mystery to start a revolution of rumors: Krug's voice-- melancholy wiping its eyes, self-medicating with the refrain "All fires have to burn alive/ To live"-- is echoed, just slightly, by someone else's. Is it Mercer? Is it Bejar? Who's that tapping a tom at the end? And shaking that tambourine? A supergroup where each member is comfortable enough to forsake his identity for the benefit of the whole? This could be exciting.

MP3: Swan Lake: All Fires
Posted by Grayson Currin in indie rock on Wed: 08-09-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cold War Kids Cold War Kids
"Hospital Beds"
[2006]
★½
Like so many Facebook profiles, this Californian four-piece probably likes just about anything but country. Recently signed to Downtown Records, they cite an exhausting list of influences-- everything from Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and U2, to, several paragraphs later, Belle and Sebastian and Nirvana. In particular, frontman Nathan Willett needs to realize he can't be every singer he idolizes at once, because no matter how good the rest of the band sounds, his pompous delivery makes every song sound like a Jeff Buckley cover band playing a wedding while drunk. Here, what could've been a nice mixtape number snuggled in between humble Voxtrot and Antony and the Johnsons ballads blows a gasket, at times stretching for soulful Black Crowes heights à la "She Talks to Angels". I suppose hidden somewhere in between Dylan and Cobain there was a Crowes shout-out, but they could at least have paid homage to their heroes by writing a damn chorus.

MP3: Cold War Kids: Hospital Beds
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Wed: 08-09-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ghostface & AG Ghostface & AG
"Crunchtime (2K007)"
[2006]
★
Ghost had to shoot a brick eventually, and this is it. Fortunately, you don't have to pay for it because it will be on some video game (not like you'd pay for it anyway). That's right, it's a basketball-themed song that's not Kurtis Blow! These things are always great because the rappers never give a shit, but they'll show up and say stuff like, "I play the most valuable position/ I move basketballs like a man on a mission" because they get paid ludicrous cash by whatever company makes *2K7*. You can't fault Ghost for getting money-- he's got Theodore Unit to feed-

- but that is Rick Ross territory right there. "Watch me glide to the hoop like a bird with wings." More like *John* Starks.

The best thing about this song, though, is the inclusion of AG. Of Showbiz & AG? D.I.T.C? Nothing? This is a guy that used to run with Big L, Fat Joe, Big Pun, and OC when they were all making classic NYC albums. Dan the Automator, the producer of the song, obviously has a thing for AG; he put him on a Handsome Boy Modeling School song a couple years ago. It's definitely great to see his name on a track once a year, but good lord, he sounds kind of depressed. Or tired. I'd rather no one heard him like this because his first two records with Showbiz are insane, and when he says, "Me and Ghost is like Kobe and Shaq in '01," I swear someone yawns into the mic, loudly. As far as the Automator's beat, it's a snoozer, too.

Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Tue: 08-08-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Uffie Uffie
"Pop the Glock"
[2006]

Not sure if there's a better living embodiment of the hipster cliché than an 18-year-old Paris-by-way-of-Miami fashionista with a purported love of the Dirty South singing "pop the glock" over and over in cutesy bubblegum vocoder style for a 12" release that comes with remixes from her French house DJ boyfriend and exclusively on hot pink vinyl, but if you find it, don't let me know, 'cause I'd rather sit through the Cobra Snake dude-only omnibus slideshow than ever hear this again.

Look, the defining rule is that a good enough track temporarily forgives all, even if "all" comprises an artfully squeezed-out moustache, a $90 t-shirt, and ironic gang symbols, but this is so wispy it makes Annie sound like a goat killer and so joyfully awash in entitlement it's got me thinking about my non-existent children's futures. It doesn't help that "Pop the Glock" is peppered with things like gunshot samples and clumsily enunciated lyrics like "My style in this flow/ Is confusing 'cause you don't know" and "Like dough/ Dough I like/ Boys call me when they feel freaky hot." The best part is that all of it's meant to prove just how banging Uff is when she busts the proverbial lyrical nut! Talk about being hoisted by your own petard. Or: hanged by your own kerchief.

Stream: Uffie: Pop the Glock
Posted by Mark Pytlik in electro pop on Tue: 08-08-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Arctic Monkeys Arctic Monkeys
"Leave Before the Lights Come On"
[2006]
★★★★

Arctic Monkeys keep right on going with "Leave Before the Lights Come On", a banging single with a somewhat terrifying video featuring a strangely predatory way to meet people. What puts these guys over the top for me is their sense of composition and dynamics-- they don't just write a couple of chord progressions and call it a song. "Leave Before the Lights Come On" is full of double stops and gaps that throw Alex Turner's rough northern accent into sharp relief and sink the hooks way in.

The song doesn't leave their familiar hook-ups-and-nightclubs territory, but it does move the plot a little further toward real adulthood, progressing from "This is a good idea/ You wouldn't do me if it wasn't one," to "How can you wake up/ With someone you don't love/ And not feel slightly fazed by it?" Underrated drummer Matt Helders has an uncanny knack for distinguishing the sections of a song by switching up the beat, and he's on his game here helping to prove that the Monkeys are capable of building depth and ambiguity into their laddish narratives.

Video: Arctic Monkeys: Leave Before the Lights Come On
Posted by Joe Tangari in indie rock on Tue: 08-08-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

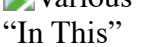
Little Brother Little Brother
“Life of the Party [ft. Carlitta Durand]”
[2006]
★★★★
I get the craziest letters for saying 9th Wonder ruins Little Brother, so I'll just let "Life of the Party" serve as evidence. Produced by Nottz (Ghostface's "Be This Way", Biggie's "Dangerous MC's", M.O.P.'s "Big Boy Game"), the song is a lesson on how to create a solid, knocking beat for summer on the East Coast-- a groove that soothes and moves romance, you might say. A supple bassline, strings that swoon from the humidity, some girls singing "ahh"s like they just sipped Lipton, bellyflop drums, and you've got it.

Phonte and Big Pooh sound as relieved as I do to hear them over someone else's beat. They're both far more relaxed and far less concerned with what every other rapper is doing and instead crack on themselves ("We can't afford Cris/ Frontin' like we boycott") which is always a better alternative to just complaining. Phonte's verse, especially, is packed with the kind of clever lemonade-from-lemons that makes him so appealing: "People get sad cuz they think we should be mad/ At all them niggaz with big money and big chains/ But the way I see it, as long as I don't blow/ Each and every year I'll be the Next Big Thing." Pooh's verse is less skillful but funnier, talking about standing in the cold outside the club without a gold record and getting left by not-good-looking girls in favor of VIP. To beat a dead horse, the sooner the "biggest rap stars in your apartment complex" get away from 9th Wonder, the better for all of us.

MP3: Little Brother: Life of the Party [ft. Carlitta Durand]
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Tue: 08-08-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Alan Jackson Alan Jackson
“Like Red on a Rose”
[2006]
★★
Damned if Alan Jackson doesn't attempt to sex this song up. He sings like he's trying to seduce, all gentle vibrato and desperate restraint, as if even the least bit of crass grandstanding would break some tacit promise. Unfortunately, the song's got a headache tonight. It declines Jackson's come-on with a meandering melody and cold-shower similes like "You make my blood flow/ Like red on a rose." The last straw is the line "I love you like all children love pennies," a strange and singularly unsexy comparison that conjures unfortunate K-Fed associations (redundant, I know). Ultimately, this is a performance in search of a song. She's no good for you, Alan.

Stream: Alan Jackson: Like Red on a Rose
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Tue: 08-08-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Various Various
“In This”
[2006]
★★★
With the daytime identities of Sleeparchive and Rex the Dog now public domain, England's Various (or Various Production, depending on where you're e-shopping) has inherited the title of electronic music's most compelling whodunit by default. But even without the bonus anonymity angle, they'd still be raking grafs; in the course of dabbling in everything from plunderphonics and 1950s pop to dubstep and r&b across a series of uncommonly versatile vinyl releases over the past eighteen months or so, the duo has sparked a slow-burning underground frenzy and inspired a hefty label bidding war.

While this track-- which bidding war victors XL Recordings are about to reissue on 7"-- is nowhere to be found on their forthcoming full-length debut *The World Is Gone*, it's the first to find Various trying their hands at producing for a proper MC, and as it turns out, they can do that too. Featuring guest vocals from Luton rapper V.E.X., "In This" is a busy, swarming production that sounds like it might as well have been plucked straight from El-Producto's wheelhouse. It's far from the best thing they've ever done (seriously, go hunt down those

early 7"s and 12"s), but it's still further proof of their impressive reach, and reason #1827 they're the odds-on favorite to become 2006's most talked-about dilettantes.

Posted by Mark Pytlik in electronic on Mon: 08-07-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Plan B Plan B
"Sick 2 Def"
[2006]
★★★★

The Fugees tried this with "Vocab" twelve years ago, trading sneaky, buoyant punchlines over a spare acoustic guitar and absolutely nothing else. But here's a line none of them thought of: "I talk so foul, I talk so coarse/ I show no regret, I show no remorse/ Like a necromaniac raping a corpse up the anal passage while contracting genital warts." Plan B is a white British rapper with a few unfortunate Insane Clown Posse tendencies, but he knows how to make this acoustic-rap thing work, how to make it riveting even. Here's the secret: he's not joking. There's no joy in his voice. He's spitting absolutely vile shit, but he's doing it from the POV of a brow-furrowed moralist, shooting darts at the parents' groups who haven't yet heard of him because he just knows they're going to want to get rid of him.

And so he brings up every example of old-man debauchery he can think of; Gary Glitter is not exempt. And then he unleashes an absolutely masterful third verse, borrowing Nas and Christopher Nolan's backwards-storyline gimmickery and breathlessly detailing a stabbing: "He removes his hand so that you can see the cut, and as the knife undoes the slice, it closes back up/ He unsays the words he said, which were 'What the fuck?', and unscreams the scream from the first initial cut." But it's not entirely empty bloodletting; the final payoff comes when the killer goes back into his apartment and listens to the Plan B CD, which of course leads to the police blaming the rapper for the murder. Look, paranoid defensiveness is nothing new, but it's rarely done this gracefully.

Stream: Plan B: Sick 2 Def
Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Mon: 08-07-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Thom Yorke Thom Yorke
"The Drunkk Machine"
[2006]
★★½

One of the first B-sides from Yorke's *Eraser* project opts for oblique sound collage over tangible song form, which means more forbidding spoken word ("The drunkk machine/ Spitting nonsense/ Spitting feathers/ Talking in tongues/ Swiveling heads/ Splittin' hairs") mumbled over a mostly tuneless mess of glitch particles, discordant bell tones, and digital shrapnel. Its defining feature is Yorke's from-the-belly feline scream, which transitions its last act into a messy outro of scattershot rhythms and pinprick guitars. Yorke's on record as saying he chose not to give this headliner status because "it would have been like putting a massive stink bomb in the middle of the record"; while "The Drunkk Machine" is hardly as agitating as that quote makes it seem (although, come to think of it, dude's probably got a couple of really amazing noise records in him) his instincts on this one were pretty much on the money. A nice enough B-side, but probably not enough to inspire *Eraser*-haters to tracklist tweak in the name of a better full-length.
Posted by Mark Pytlik in electronic on Mon: 08-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Pack The Pack
"Vans"
[2006]
★★★★

Authenticity is rap's major hang-up. A cherry-picked fidelity to reality-- the rapper's sordid past always hogging center stage-- is the dogma that rules the genre's coarser regions. Because if you didn't grow up in government housing, peddle cocaine, do time, and take a bullet, clearly you're an effete fraud from the suburbs. And that

doesn't move units: white-owned record companies won't be able to exploit the violence-is-cool poverty tourism of largely white consumers.

Enter the Pack, chanting in their eerily robotic whisper over an undulating square-wave doorchime: "I got my Vans on, but they look like sneakers." Two surprises here. First, the song slams the extortion-grade pricing that Nike made *de rigueur*. Second, by extension, it bravely embraces an almost Emersonian aversion to conformity. Everyone sports Jordans or AF1s. Wearing Vans in the Bay is a wallet-friendly deviation: from their expressive palette ("different colors like rainbows") to their $36 price tag ("don't cost Gs"), "Vans" is a rare ode to style on the cheap. Big on conspicuous while small on consumption, this is trend-bucking at its most, well, authentic.

Stream: The Pack: Vans
Posted by Roque Strew in hyphy on Mon: 08-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

I Love My MPC 2000 but I've Chosen Prog Metal I Love My MPC 2000 But I've Chosen Prog Metal
“Battle of Zora”
[2006]
★★★
This skeletal track from the mysterious I Love My MPC 2000 but I've Chosen Prog Metal is the alleged result of trying to merge the dark, off-kilter elegance of art-heshers like Isis and Boris with hip hop's technology and crisp boom-bap, but dude (or dudette) might as well have just listened to a lot of Excepter. On "Battle of Zora", a series of imbricate yet distinct loops-- clustery fillips of bass and rubbery contrapuntal synths, staccato volleys of drums, and a phased and flickering voice-- gradually slither toward a trunk-rattling outro, but only after establishing an aura of complex shadow and disconcerting, wind-whistled open space. Rather than simply welding screaming guitars onto splashy drums, ILMMPC2000BICPM takes a more gestural and loosely interpretative approach, rendering the putative prog-metal-hop (which is closer to the ol' IDM than anything) with Butoh-like evocation.

MP3: I Love My MPC 2000 but I've Chosen Prog Metal: Battle of Zora
Posted by Brian Howe in experimental on Mon: 08-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Justin Timberlake Justin Timberlake
“My Love [ft. T.I.]”
[2006]
★★★★★
All of Timbaland's best r&b beats-- Ginuwine's "Pony", Destiny's Child's "Get on the Bus", various Aaliyah hits-- are based on his revolutionary decision to make slow jams 300 bpm, in the process creating songs that can turn a party into a dance encyclopedia, slow grinds next to jittery popping. With that foundation Timbaland can do anything he wants. "Cry Me A River" was the last song where he did all the right things: swelling synths, bubbling keys, Justin's Doug E. Fresh beatbox, Tim's own peculiar vocal adlibs buried twenty layers deep, etc. That it coincided perfectly with the teen dream breakup of all time was the kind of dumb luck that makes these songs timeless. Since then, Timbaland's had a bit of a relative slump ("Promiscuous Girl" aside), while Justin's been trying to grow a beard and canoodle with Cammy Cam.

They both return to form on "My Love", the answer to "Cry Me A River" in every way. Justin's come out victorious and in love in 2006, and packs his full nerd-lothario persona into his falsetto, practically weeping lyrics like, "What's the point of waiting anymore?/ 'Cuz girl I've never been more sure [That baby it's you]." When it comes to gruesomely awesome displays of emotion for famous girls, Justin Timberlake is Shakespeare, and this, I guess, is how he proposes to Ms. Diaz.

But "My Love" ain't shit without the absolute mania of this beat. We've all been dying for the return of the weird science fiction of Timbaland, and he brings it all back: massive transformer synth, rumbling bass hits, that damn JT clickity-shushing beatbox, an operatic wailer over the chorus, and what sounds like a Tourettic Porky Pig spitting percussion. Of course, it's not Tim if he's not mumbling something vaguely sexy the whole time, so that's here, as well. And, as if he knew his own woeful raps wouldn't cut it this time, Tim brings in T.I. for some

Cyrano shit. The verse is boilerplate guest spot, "stand-up guy" and whatnot, but it's the ideal chillaxing of Timberlake's pussywhipped whimpering.

It's not perfect-- misery is always better than bliss-- but it's as good as these two get.
Posted by Peter Macia in r&b on Fri: 08-04-06: 02:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

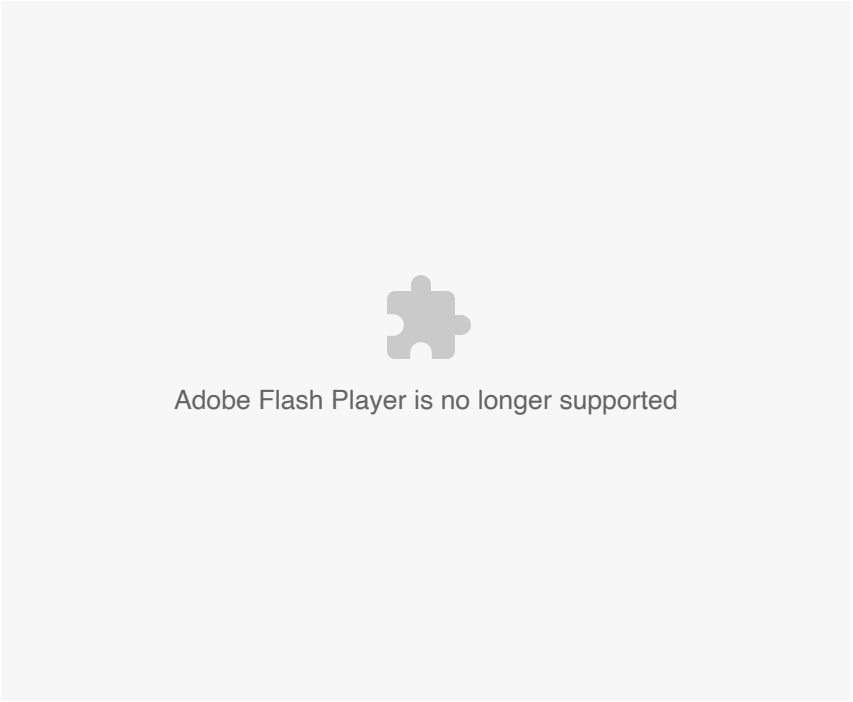
Future of the Left Future of the Left
“The Lord Hates a Coward”
[2006]
★★★
What, we're not supposed to get excited and over-analytical with MySpace demos? Fuck that: Andy Falkous and Jack Egglestone have posted their first new tracks since Mclusky's dissolution, and it sounds like they're picking up pretty much where they left off. There's much in "The Lord Hates a Coward" that will sound familiar to fans, like the gurgling bass and the neck-snapping guitar riff that circles like a factory line thrown in in reverse.

What's weird is that it plays against a rather relaxed vocal from Falco, despite him letting threats slip into the lyrics (repeating "violence solves everything" as a mantra). He gets in a good throat-scraping scream, but only to alternate with staccato slips of harmony on the chorus, creating an unsettling but even-handed push-pull. It's a clever way to sabotage a melody, yet they manage to escape the hole they've happily dug for themselves. So we have dark, heavy, menacing "asshole rock" and all that-- but who remembers that these guys also had a wicked sense of humor? Similar to the molar-grinding experiments from *The Difference Between Me And You...*, Mclusky dropped the ball not far from here, so "Coward" is an easy kick through the posts. I'm just still waiting for a punchline, is all.

Stream: Future of the Left: The Lord Hates a Coward
Posted by Jason Crock in indie rock on Fri: 08-04-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Herbert Herbert
“Moving Like a Train (Lidell's Radio Raw Hymn Remix)”
[2006]
★★
Given that he's working from an album positively rammed with elegant, snowflake-sophisticated productions, I'm not exactly sure why Herbert fingered this goofy Jamiroquai-soundalike as his next single, but nonetheless, here it is, with previous Herbert remix benefactor Jamie Lidell at the controls returning the favor. To his credit, Lidell smartly neutralizes "Moving Like A Train"'s rank Jay Kay hat smell by swapping the strings out for some gassy basslines and busy-sounding percussion; problem is, in doing so, he inadvertently smudges all the other traces of Herbert's fingerprints. What we end up with is a herky-jerky bubblepot of slap-funk and synthetic boom-bap banging up against Dani Siciliano's Studio 54-friendly vocals. A nice idea, just so not the right song.
Stream: Herbert: Moving Like a Train (Lidell's Radio Raw Hymn Remix)
Posted by Mark Pytlik in electro pop on Fri: 08-04-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Chingy Chingy
“Pullin' Me Back [ft. Tyrese]”
[2006]
½



Truth told I'd have taken a "Holidae Inn" rehash-- something blithe, bouncy, and funny in that chewed up by mom then spit back in my mouth way. But "Pullin' Me Back" isn't even Chingy's song. It's a stepladder for celebrity-cum-crooner Tyrese. Sure he's got the winning combination-- pecs 'n' pipes-- but no charisma, nothing humanizing. He's a specimen, as short on personality as Chingy is on memorable lines. Call him the poor man's Jamie Foxx.

That makes Ching, what, the homeless man's Kanye West? Impressively, he's managed to regress with every single since "Right Thurr". Flows don't get much more monotonous; if they did there'd be no point using words. What really bothers me about this song, though: The hook laments, "Every time I try to go/ something keeps pulling me back," but there's no attempt to figure out what that something is. A slapdash description of her walk or her some stupid thing would've sufficed; we never even find out who made her purse.

Stream: Chingy: Pullin' Me Back [ft. Tyrese]
Posted by Sam Ubl in hip hop on Fri: 08-04-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Machinefabriek Machinefabriek
“Kreukeltape”
[2006]
★★★★½
For those of us unable to spare five consecutive hours to take in the entirety of ambient drone's *Ring* cycle, *The Disintegration Loops*, Machinefabriek kindly serves up the Cliff's Notes. "Kruekeltape" has all the snap-crackle-pop and eerie discord of William Basinski's glorified tape-eating, yet at five minutes you can spin it several times on your morning commute-- making the road to work that much bleaker.

The cacophony of a jack that can't quite find its hole sets the scene for rain-like static and tape hiccups that sound like distant thunder, which eventually coalesce around a sparse, elegiac piano melody draped over looped cello. Notes amble along, shifting increasingly out of pitch until a death knell low-octave chord hits, rattling discordantly into a sandstorm of building tape hiss. This is harrowing, gloom-stricken, bowels-of-the-earth shit, a requiem for something that never had the chance to exist.
Posted by Matthew Solarski in ambient on Fri: 08-04-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Beck Beck
“Think I'm in Love”
[2006]

★★
Usually when Beck thinks he's fallen in love, he either waxes goofily sentimental, ignoring his eclectic tastes and pulling out the acoustic, or crushes his love in an onslaught of samples, drum beats, and arcane lyrics, vulcanizing any gooey pathos into rock-solid white-boy freakout. Now when Beck *sings about* thinking he's in love, that's a different animal.

Sure, Nigel Godrich works behind the boards on this one-- which popped up on YouTube earlier this week and vanished just as quickly-- but he adds little cachet to what's practically a *Guero* B-side. Beck sounds as emotionally distant crooning about love here as he did on most of that album, which would be fine if the instrumentation didn't sound so aloof as well. I didn't buy the accusations surrounding Beck's self-nostalgia on *Guero*, never held him guilty of lazily trying to revisit his un-revisitable golden period or anything psychological like that. However, this tune's fence-straddling, half-assed funkiness-- while adhering to conventional rock songwriting rules-- concerns me about Beck's creative mojo. Compared to his past works, it's like he's taking a Rorschach test and his best reply is always "I see ink splattered on paper."

Posted by Adam Moerder in alternative rock on Thu: 08-03-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

McAlmont & Butler McAlmont & Butler
“Speed”
[2006]
★½
Holy power ballad! David McAlmont and Bernard Butler are back again, cranking up the string section. Their breakup in 1996 after just one album was so acrimonious, you figured they'd never be back, but they reconvened in 2002, and apparently intend to make it a habit now. Frankly, the first record they cut together wasn't great (I think my old copy of *The Sound of* is still at a Reckless Records in Chicago, if you're looking, though), so the reunion is about as welcome as it was expected. This song is huge, epic, even, but you know what? Bloat is a kind of huge, and this song is retaining water in a bad way.

"Living is changing faster/ Can you feeeeeeeeel it?/ Nothing stays the same for long these daaaays, yeah/ Faster than the bullet trains in the Eeeeeeeeeeast, eh/ A destination uncertain on the wind, yeah," sings McAlmont, hitting a falsetto on the drawn-out "e"s that suggests he might consider changing his last name to Coverdale. So he's on about how much faster everything is getting, a fine theme, but it's not like this is a new development, either. Things have been moving faster ever since man started hitting rocks together and calling them tools. And the music is too cluttered to signify a return to clarity. Butler doesn't do much with his guitar, but he does nick the beat from Suede's "Killing of a Flash Boy" and slow it to a crawl to support the histrionic string arrangement. Back in '94, he made this kind of unmitigated pomp work so well on songs like "Still Life" and "Daddy's Speeding", but those songs worked because they had as many emotional layers as musical ones. This is just one note played a million times over on a hundred instruments at once.

Stream: McAlmont & Butler: Speed
Posted by Joe Tangari in orchestral pop on Thu: 08-03-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

DJ Shadow DJ Shadow
“Backstage Girl [ft. Phonte Coleman]”
[2006]
★★★★
As of this writing, the newswire reads, "Jeremy Enigk Returns." Les Savy Fav reissue a record from 1999, and the fat ass of history falls over a wall. Do people even remember DJ Shadow? He does have a MySpace page, but he joined post-Rupert. Ew. He's like, old. Not old, but wise enough to think the antidote to Southern rap might be Southern rock, switch snap for Skynyrd, "Shoulda Lean" for "Simple Man", and make it seven minutes long. Good God, there's a guitar-sample-solo on here.

The pitfalls of rap rock are numerous, but this is not Kid Rock. Shadow's juxtaposition of Southern rock-- a genre filled with tales of scornful women and the devil with whom they collude-- with Phonte Coleman of North

Carolina's Little Brother, a rapper who utilizes MySpace to scorn Southern rap, is genius. Pretense yes, but these are two guys who seem willing, and able, to risk looking silly in order to try something new. "Backstage Girl" is a rambling, blues-drenched epic that allows Phonte to flaunt his knack for plot, spinning a complex storyline with himself as protagonist and a surprisingly fleshed out evil temptress as his foil. He runs from the devil who only wants to be his "insignificant other" over a Southern funk rhythm, only to lose his religion when the beat drops out, speedtalking a justification as the rhythm rebuilds. The moral: "I gotta stop fuckin' with these hoes off of MySpace, dog." Drum solo!!

Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Thu: 08-03-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

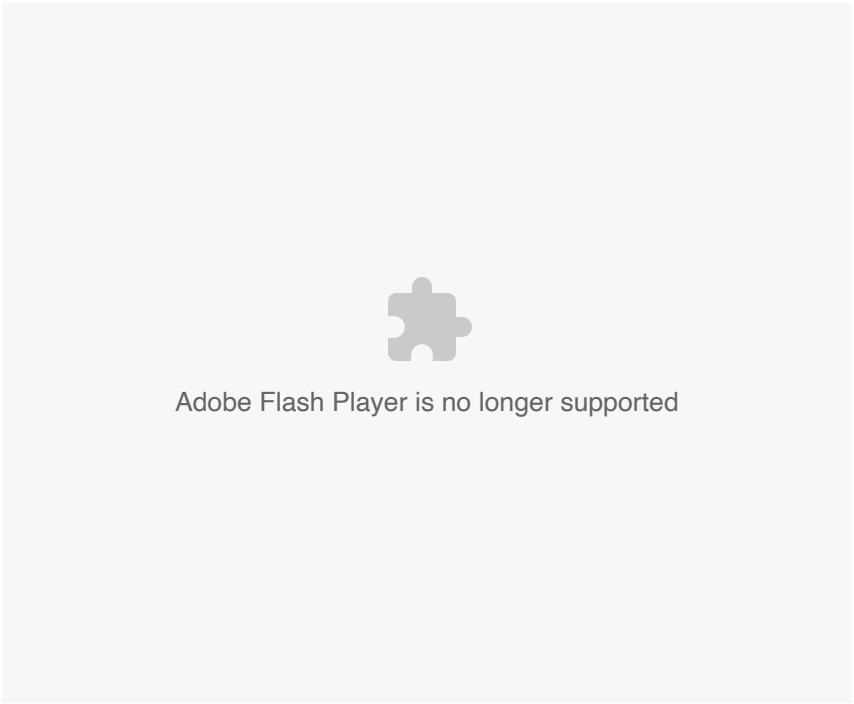
A-Side: OM
“Bedouin's Vigil”
B-Side: Six Organs of Admittance
“Assyrian Blood”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★★
B-Side: ★★½
OM's Al Cisneros joined Six Organs of Admittance for "River of Transfiguration", the gorgeous 24-minute drone that closes *The Sun Awakens*-- likely a beyond-dream-come-true for Six Organs' centerpiece Ben Chasny, who came of age in California worshipping Sleep and, later, obsessing over OM's *Variations on a Theme*.

That idolatry certainly isn't to say that OM should get the best of Six Organs on a split 7", but, here, the duo does prevail: Six Organs' "Assyrian Blood" is an overly grabby hodgepodge of some of Chasny's best ideas, juxtaposing a quietly approaching horizon of pinging guitar tones, gently washing noise, and glimpses of shamanic chanting with the realist nightmare of a scabrous, high-sustain guitar lament. It's a case study in what makes Six Organs so interesting, but its jumpy nature-- pings into chants into hair-raising into all three in just four minutes-- trivializes the gamut.

OM, however, make it all seem so important, offering ellipses instead of bookends: Feedback mounts as Cisneros searches for the right note. When he finds it, he and drummer Chris Hakius march, the latter pacing carefully and Cisneros outfitting his bass tone with more fuzz than usual. He plays few notes, his skuzzy sustain and Hakius' heavy thuds alone allowing deliverance of each line. Not even four minutes later, Cisneros sings his final note and they fade out together, chasing down the dawn and making it clear that this is only a vinyl-sized glimpse into a sky-big continuum.

Posted by Grayson Currin in experimental on Thu: 08-03-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

“Washington”
[2006]
★★★★½



Everybody knows George Washington warned against entangling alliances in his 1796 farewell address. What this track presupposes is: maybe he didn't? That maybe he, instead, had four testicles, radioactive manhood, and a patriotic predilection for pain-infliction? Austin, Texas-based comic book artist Brad Neely-- perhaps best known for *Wizard People, Dear Reader*, his Harry Potter spoof-- is the revisionist historian behind this "Lazy Sunday"-style slacker rap. Two-note bass, random panting, and straight-up synth snare do little to distract from Neely's nasal lyrics about Washington's girth, dude's ride, his genitalia (again), and especially which children he'll save-- or won't. Neely finally wraps up with a series of increasingly nonsensical non sequiturs, though by that point they almost make sense. And the whole thing's illustrated and immortalized in a YouTube video. Stop me if you've sent all your friends this before.

Posted by Marc Hogan in wtf on Thu: 08-03-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Luciano & Thomas Melchior Luciano & Thomas Melchior
“Solomon's Prayer”
[2006]
★★★★
Ok, let it all out. Let out that steam that's been building in your brain for the last 45 minutes because you need to come down with me to the minimal world. This world will not harm you; in fact, a lot of its people don't even think it's all that "minimal", just a place where everything is optimized, nothing is wasted, and you know where you stand with extended, micro-varied formal structures.

Swiss (via Chile) producer/DJ Luciano is often credited with being an innovator here (though as usual, expect the artists to be even less comfortable with labels than their fans), and his 12" with Thomas Melchior is a nice little ride through our tropical zones. Oh, perhaps you'd enjoy this a little more sitting down. I'm not saying you have to, but some of those electro-gamelan tones will resonate a little better if you're not moving three ways at once. Ahem. In any case, it really is an almost perfectly realized travel itinerary through the digital Caribbean, with the pinging, aforementioned tones chasing each other like the little metallic balls on strings bosses keep as desk ornaments. Listen closely enough, and you'll start to hear layers of clicking percussion, chattering away like insects on the floor of the Amazon. Everything down here is teeming with miniature life, so if you start to lose your way, just peer down a little closer, and everything will become clear.
Posted by Dominique Leone in minimal on Wed: 08-02-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lavender Diamond Lavender Diamond
“In Heaven There Is No Heat”

[2006]
★★★★½

David Byrne had us believe that heaven is a place where nothing ever happens. But that's heresy, at least according to the gospel of Becky Stark, the magnificent voice behind Los Angeles' Lavender Diamond. "In heaven, there is no heat," goes the title declaration of this tune that originally appeared on LD's 2005 EP *The Cavalry of Light*. Stark makes her claim in a voice that permeates politely, the ponderous beauty of Nico and the crystalline grace of Emmylou Harris coalescing. A voice like this could convince anyone of anything-- heaven, hell, life, death-- and the simple guitar/drum/piano/tambourine accompaniment puts the emphasis where it belongs.

"Dream the kind of life that you will find/ That kind of love that lasts forever," Stark pleads, sweetly selling utopian aphorisms like Linda Ronstadt around a campfire in a redwood forest. As with the Talking Heads, nothing ever happens: Verse one is identical to verse two is identical to verse three, and the chorus follows suit. But repetition this beatifically beautiful should last forever. If only it would.

Posted by Grayson Currin in indie folk on Wed: 08-02-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Long Blondes The Long Blondes
“Separated by Motorways [Woodie Taylor Version]”
[2006]
★★★

For the first few seconds of this track I went into cardiac arrest. The Blondes' signature post-punk strut succumbing to attention-starved YYYs runoff, an unwieldy surf riff wiping out all over the place, leading lady Kate Jackson aping the sophomoric Be Your Own Pet persona she counseled (and patronized) on "Once and Never Again"-- it sounded like these slick revivalist eggheads were suffering a brain fart. Then to the rescue comes a chorus of sped-up doo-wop. Suddenly it's like Jackson doesn't even know who Karen O is anymore, and the highway-bound tale of "two girls on the run" ominously unfurls over the chords to auto disaster ballad "Last Kiss". Too bad we can't just trim the expository fat and cut to the juicy car chase sooner.

Stream: The Long Blondes: Separated by Motorways [Woodie Taylor Version]

Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Wed: 08-02-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pitbull Pitbull
“Bojangles”
[2006]
★★★

Adobe Flash Player is no longer supported

"Call dat girl Bojangles." Does that mean she likes to: dance? Eat buffalo wings? Squabble? I usually don't go to Pitbull expecting ambiguity. But then, he's all about innuendo-charged slang: "Toma", remember, can mean to take either a drink *or* a penis. So has 'Bull stepped up his lyrical complexity game? In a word, yes (really), though he should ditch couplets like the enjambed jewel, "Take it to, take it to the house/ Party, I'm a take it, I'm a take it to her mouth." The song would still thunder without such c'mon come-ons because Lil Jon is Zeus. He gives the track some serious taiko drum under armor and drops knifing synths from the sky. Stock merchandise, of course, but it beats "Snap Yo Fingers", if only because this hook-up answers to PB&J (ha ha).

Stream: Pitbull: Bojangles
Posted by Sam Ubl in hip hop on Wed: 08-02-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Shivvers
“Teen Line”
[1980; r: 2006]
★★★★

Fate is arbitrary at best, cruel at worst, and it's hard to countenance that the Go-Go's are still a household name while the Shivvers are all but forgotten. It's probably because the Shivvers only got around to recording one 45. And maybe that's because A&R departments just weren't checking Milwaukee in 1980. It can't be any deficiency in the music: "Teen Line"-- recently returned to print on the Hyped to Death Shivvers retrospective *Lost Hits From Milwaukee's First Family of Powerpop*-- is an immaculate power pop confection, as adorably spry as anything Belinda Carlisle ever belted out. Punchy rhythm guitars and tropical tinker-toy leads hop around on pogo sticks as Jill Kossoris lets loose a virus-catchy vocal melody, all pink chiffon and bedraggled melisma. Forget Le Tigre, *this* is the band with the roller-skate jams.
Posted by Brian Howe in power pop on Wed: 08-02-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Emily Haines & the Soft Skeleton
“Our Hell”
[2006]
★★★★

Emily Haines' pixie-voiced appearance on Broken Social Scene's swirling balladic signature "Anthems for a Seventeen Year-Old Girl" offered no hints of the synth rock moxie she displays as frontwoman for Metric. Nor does the latter band provide any sort of prelude to the mercurial (and Mercury Rev-like), piano-based compositions heard on Haines' upcoming solo album (with backing band the Soft Skeleton), on which she leaves

Metric's discotheque glamour behind to nestle in a dark, disenchanted forest haunted by benevolent spirits-- most notably that of John Lennon.

Opening track "Our Hell" is one of a handful of songs on the album written while mourning her late father, revered poet (and Robert Wyatt collaborator) Paul Haines. But its central lyric-- "our hell is a good life"-- also does wonders to provide perspective on your own hell: whether you've just been dumped, failed your finals, or received a sub-5.0 rating from this website, just turn on the news-- you've still got it pretty good.

Stream: Emily Haines & the Soft Skeleton: Our Hell
Posted by Stuart Berman in indie rock on Tue: 08-01-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Of Montreal Of Montreal
"Forecast Fascist Future (IQU Remix)"
[2006]
★★★½
Of Montreal might worship the 1960s' sunniest pop, but the band also razzes its uptight influences by consistently leveling the traditional song structure of the classics. Stops, starts, and unexpected shifts make Kevin Barnes' kooky tunes a rollercoaster headphone trip. But on IQU's reworking of "Forecast Fascist Future", from the vinyl-only remix album *Satanic Twins*, the band emerges from the slice-and-dice sounding more linear and cohesive than ever. Chalk it up to the steady pace laid out from the onset by a growling bass line and wickedly funky drum loop. Still, there's plenty of evidence that we're still dealing with Of Montreal, as IQU weave in a howling theremin, vintage organ tones, and a distortion-drenched guitar riff. Amazingly, it works so well you could bump this shit in your Jeep-- er, VW bus.
Stream: Of Montreal: Forecast Fascist Future (IQU Remix)
Posted by John Motley in indie rock on Tue: 08-01-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Photo by Andria Degens A-Side: Current 93
"Inerrant Infallible (Black Ships at Ninevah and Edom)"
B-Side: OM
"Rays of the Sun/To the Shrinebuilder"
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★
B-Side: ★★★★½

Strange splitfellows, indeed: OM is Chris Hakius and Al Cisneros-- the colossal rhythm section of stoner-metal icons Sleep-- who've released two albums. Current 93, on the other hand, is the 24-year-old, nearly 30-album-deep project led by "apocalyptic folk" frontiersman David Tibet. Tibet dislikes folk as much as he does metal, but considers OM one of the most important bands in the world.

Each band takes to its respective side from different angles. As on its recent 7" split with Six Organs of Admittance, OM enters and exits via auditory ellipses to answer the temporal challenge of 10 inches at 45rpm. They grate in on feedback succumbing to bass throbs, soon washed by perhaps the heaviest OM outing yet: Hakius' arms work a brutal doubletime, pouncing lead-heavy rolls inside an immaculate drum sound, matched only by Cisneros' fleet bass chug. It falls off after five minutes, settling into a ponderous break-- "Toward allegiant rays yonder/ Memory antiphon rue," Cisneros pontificates, slow, meditative, patient-- before battling back, sailing away on an exiting bass hum. Elevation in fractions.

But Current 93's A-side-- a missing scene from Tibet's apocalyptic dream, *Black Ships Ate the Sky*-- seems almost minor out of its context, the refined holism of *Black Ships*. A repetitive four-note bassline leads sine-like washes of guitar noise and a wayward bagpipe melody, a see-sawing bed for Tibet's religious quandaries (and references to Reese Witherspoon, Atlantis, and Toronto), cast out with seething braggadocio: "Souls grow off twigs/ Black sticks with green smiles/ There are no other songs." It's strong, but too alone to cast the intended diorama.

Posted by Grayson Currin in experimental on Tue: 08-01-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

BOAT BOAT
“Elephant Ears”
[2006]
★★★★½

Educational inequity is a serious problem in America, and neither the Republicans ("test the kids and divert tax dollars to Christian schools") nor the Democrats ("...") have a serious solution. Seattle-via-Chicago "sloppy pop" trio BOAT may not be a "serious" band-- as their name and froggy indie-dork vocals suggest-- but this self-deprecating reminiscence of a failed Teach for America teacher more believably depicts the Chicago Public School District than anything in the *Tribune*, which recently ran a story lauding the city's improved test scores *on a brand new test* without ever seriously bothering to assess whether students actually, you know, learned more. (They "liked the new color format," we're told.) Everybody wins with such pleasing tales-- except the kids.

So I could give a shit about all that. "Elephant Ears" opens with tinkling bells, straightahead acoustic guitar, and wobbly theremin, soon joined by elegantly skewed feedback and a subtle drum build-up. "In a classroom with unswept floors/ I am the man in the corner, and I am waiting to sweep it," pronounces frontguy D. Crane. Then either drummer J. Goodman or bassist M. McKenzie echoes the endings of Crane's stupid phrases, like, well, "Elephant Ears". Somehow the song also makes room for a metaphor involving an eponymous watercraft and a big bridge that shamelessly name-drops Chicago El lines (that's Blue, right bitches?). "We will never win/ I'm telling you this for the last time," Crane concludes, but the future doesn't really have to be so bleak. At least not for the next three minutes.

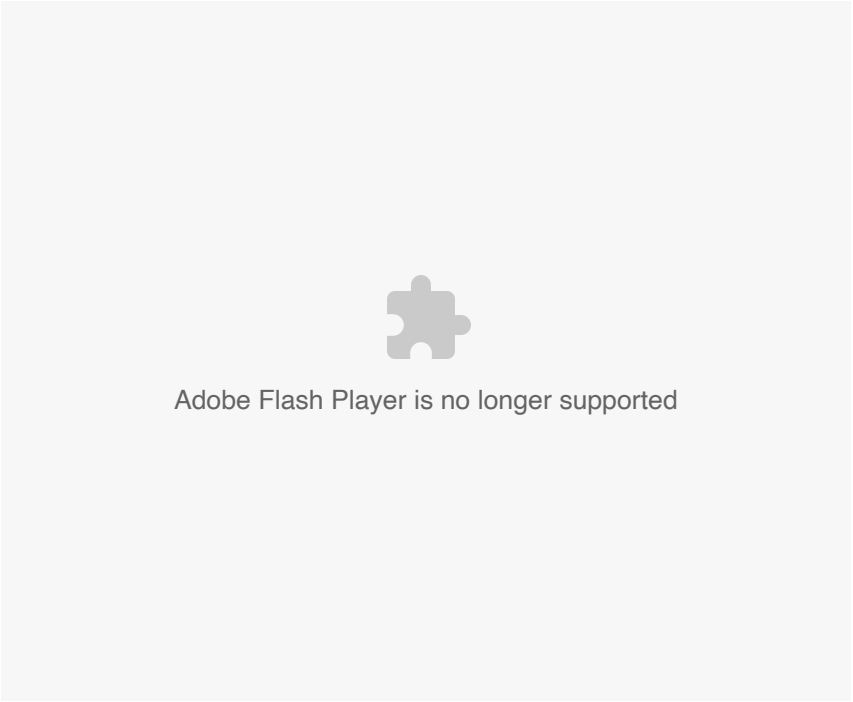
Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Tue: 08-01-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

John Lord Fonda John Lord Fonda
“So Far Away (Alan Braxe Remix)”
[2006]
★★★½

Like New Romanticism gone hopelessly psychedelic, this is drama sequined and electro-fied. Fonda is a French techno producer with no qualms about going over the top for maximum results, and letting Alan Braxe have his way with this track was a stroke of shameless genius. Braxe, in full arena mode, lets the reverb fly, maxes out all frequencies, and creates something both very hot and magnificently silly. The overall effect isn't far from what Benny Benassi did last year with Fischerspooner's "Never Win", turning ho-hum melancholy electro into LIFE CHANGING TRANCE OF THE GODS. If you can stomach the cinematic tragedy of it all, it's an impressive ride.

Posted by Dominique Leone in techno on Tue: 08-01-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Scissor Sisters Scissor Sisters
“I Don't Feel Like Dancin' [ft. Elton John]”
[2006]
★



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Everything good

=

Scissor Sisters' "I Don't Feel Like Dancin'". I don't care who's playing piano.

Posted by Peter Macia in disco on Fri: 07-28-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Game The Game
“It's Okay (One Blood) [ft. Junior Reid]”

[2006]
★★★★
The Game is blessed with a strange strain of multiple personality disorder. Though most rappers are prone to swapping allegiances while searching for a comfortable balance between credibility and mass appeal, this man takes such dualities to an artful extreme. On this hot-tempered street cut-- an Ice Cubed take on Gollum's two-faced soliloquy-- the Game begins and ends several bouts and floats ambiguities into the ether. It sounds like a send-up of a man divided; a fascinating study of the Game's internal switchboard.

Dr. Dre is referenced five times in the first 30 seconds of the song-- but he didn't have anything to do with it. Are the two on good terms? Does the Game even know? Regarding his most infamous foe, the verbal Yosemite Sam taunts, "Everybody know that I'm the heir to the Aftermath dynasty," only to claim "I ain't got beef with 50" in the next verse. Jay gets the same bait and drop when "You 38 and you still rappin'? Ugh," is followed quickly by "No beef with Jay." Still, there's a knowing cartoonishness-- as in the laugh-with-him delivery of "ugh"-- that indicates a playfulness hidden behind his token grimace. So it doesn't really matter whether the guy with a butterfly on one side and a teardrop on the other is threatening to trigger-up Lil Jon or lick a shot when "Snap Yo Fingers" comes on. For this nimble provocateur, every heartbeat brings change.

Stream: The Game: It's Okay (One Blood) [ft. Junior Reid]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Fri: 07-28-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Thermals
“A Pillar of Salt”
[2006]
★★★½
The Thermals: noisy, scrappy, snotty, devil-may-care-- and putting out a concept record? "A Pillar of Salt" is a tantalizing hint as to what will come from their sorta-kinda conceptual third album, *The Body, the Blood, the Machine*. The surrounding press will tell you of fascist Christian states and walls of sound, but no-nonsense Thermals purists needn't sweat it: the sound's only "wider" in that there're a couple overdubs and a catchy, organ-y guitar line (or guitar-y organ) that sets the hurried pace, and "brighter" in that it doesn't sound dubbed from a Texas Instruments tape recorder.

It might be more labored, but has a stronger melody to show for it, one that begs to be sung by Hutch Harris' yelp. "We were born to sin," he shouts at the top-- twice, no less-- followed up by, "we know we're not special, sir/ We know everybody is." There's a little more craft in these lyrics, but take heart: Layers of Sarcasm in Public Speaking is not a prerequisite for "A Pillar of Salt", but students hoping to move on to Intermediate Hearing Loss should begin here.

MP3: The Thermals: A Pillar of Salt
Posted by Jason Crock in indie rock on Fri: 07-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Big Sleep
“Murder”
[2006]
★★★★

Latest Frenchkiss signing the Big Sleep deliver redoubtable hard rock that aims not to capture hearts but to punch them. Supposedly if you punch someone hard enough in the heart they die. Thus "Murder", which parses Mclusky's rumbling subway low end but passes on Andy Falkous' bilious (and frankly inimitable) vocals.

The song's monotonous at first, the drums tunnel-visioned and the guitars strong yet doltishly so, but don't bother FF'ing. A soaring finale makes most sense when it redeems a banal opening frame, and "Murder"'s final minute-plus offers the kind of clouds-part radiance that can only follow extreme tension. Musically, this means once-meatheaded guitars exploding in icy, shimmering textures. It's the plane taking off in a downpour, getting rocked every which way, then breaking through the cumulonimbi. The sun is that bright.

MP3: The Big Sleep: Murder
Posted by Sam Ubl in indie rock on Fri: 07-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The A'z The A'z
“Dat Slang (Yadadamean)”
[2006]
★★★½

In the DVD commentary for the second-ever episode of "The Wire", co-creator David Simon observes that communication between Baltimore cops has become so refined that it's possible for them to hold an entire conversation using only the word "fuck." With its site-specific dialect and slack delivery, hyphy's already the bleeding edge of slanguistics, but at certain points, the A'z minimal "Yadadamean" (Mac Dre parlance for "nahmean") progresses language to sound as close to onomatopoeic as possible, while still communicating coherent thought. Fuck? Fuuuuuck.

Thank Keak for pioneering the A'z breathy Bay brogues, which top off this texturally advanced drug music, ostensibly about blunts but perfect when paired with a nice, fruity k-hole. (Or thizz, I get my horse tranquilizers all mixed up.) Its sub-bass is barely audible except to dogs and EKG monitors, and its gigantor, Dolby-testing synths and siren wails sound like they were cranked out on some janky equipment-- hyphy so grimy.

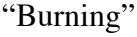
After viewing *An Inconvenient Truth*, I can no longer advocate driving cars for sport, but "Yadadamean" makes me feel like an asshole for not installing subwoofers and hydraulics in the 1972 Monte Carlo I piloted in high school.

MP3: The A'z: Dat Slang (Yadadamean)
Posted by Julianne Shepherd in hip hop on Fri: 07-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Califone Califone
“The Orchids”
[2006]
★★★★½

Every once in a while a song catches Califone leader Tim Rutili's ear and he's moved to cover it, no matter how seemingly incongruous the source. Rutili's old act Red Red Meat had two choice bits from Christmas TV specials in its repertoire: "There's Always Tomorrow" from *Bunny Gets Paid* (originally sung by button-nosed Clarice to red-nosed Rudolph) and "Welcome Christmas" from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* as the B-side to the "There's a Star Above the Manger Tonight" single. Then there was the 1995 take on 10cc's "I'm Not in Love", with a dynamic arrangement that exploded in a mess of guitar trying to cover the fact that Rutili couldn't quite hit the delicate vocal.

Here, Califone tackle Psychic TV's lilting "The Orchids", taking the spacious gamelan percussion and croaking voice of the original and transforming it into a worn and sturdy folk chestnut. Rutili's voice couldn't be more perfect for the clipped melody and skewed turns of phrase that surprise with swipes of warmth ("And in the morning after the night/ I fall in love with the light"), sounding, dare I say, inspirational. There's even some harmonica blowing in there somewhere, amplifying this Genesis P-Orridge confection into a sentimental and moving campfire sing-along for the ages. Fantastic.
Posted by Mark Richardson in indie rock on Thu: 07-27-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


The Whitest Boy Alive The Whitest Boy Alive
“Burning”
[2006]
★★★★

If Europe were ever to manufacture sleek, sexy 8-bit video games, Berlin-based the Whitest Boy Alive would be the continent's Advantage, humanizing simple electronic music into organic, warm-blooded drum/bass/guitar pop. King of Convenience Erlend Øye's fey vocals give this organism a soul, engaging in pillow talk while the backing band dowses Phoenix and Hot Chip's lothario dance pop in sterile German austerity. Like the finest

Bauhaus architecture, every instrument part's efficiently measured to a T before joining to form the edifice. Yet despite such utilitarianism, the band still pulls off the charm-- this is architecture you can dance about. Thanks to the peerless David Hasselhoff, "Burning" ain't exactly off-setting Germany's sexy deficit with the U.S., but it's a swell down payment.

Stream: Whitest Boy Alive: Burning
Posted by Adam Moerder in electro pop on Thu: 07-27-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Mastodon Mastodon
“Crystal Skull”
[2006]
★★★★

The only thing "Crystal Skull" is lacking is the rest of the fucking *Blood Mountain* sound-cycle, but I'm already at it with a pen and paper, figuring how you answer that ubiquitous downtown question about what you're listening to when you're listening to the same thing for the next 15 times you see that person.

Great tease though-- like heads didn't know the second this hit, like they don't already have sore necks and Mastodon tattoos and a shirt with a big bloody mountain on it, like every dude who's ever owned a guitar or turned their stereo up above four didn't already know it was coming-- by starting, dead-seriously, with those off-in-the-warrior-distance drums and then more Maiden dual guitar than tablature (up at their website now!) can contain. Plus the elephant sings: about bloodsucking flies, black holes, and crystals. All things you now somehow crave...

Stream: Mastodon: Crystal Skull
Posted by Zach Baron in metal on Thu: 07-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Mya Mya
“I Am [ft. Penelope Jones]”
[2006]
★★

When Mya fulfilled the Game's *King* magazine fantasies by appearing in his "Dreams" video last year, she lost much of her china doll mystique. Already benchwarming while powerhouses like Beyonce and Christina are still puffing fire, Mya's bedroom cameo basically confirmed the rapper's "get rich --> fucking r&b bitch" mentality and cheapened her own image in the process. This single goes for a quasi-feminist sexual freedom tract but ends up chafing somewhere near the bottom of the stripper pole.

Producer Kwamé's one-handed Timbaland squiggle reeks of faux club burp-up while the singer strains to prove her power over the opposite sex with lines like, "I am-- not shy/ Hook you up while you drive/ Have you feelin' like you just got high." So, basically, the only way to keep a man nowadays is to give him a blowjob while flashing down the West Side. "I do whatever others won't," she says. It's supposed to be sexy, but with the pipe dream grounded in a Motel 6, Mya comes off sleazy and desperate.

Posted by Ryan Dombal in r&b on Thu: 07-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Automatic The Automatic
“Monster”
[2006]
★½

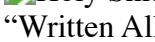
For those whose summer blockbuster appetites remain unsatiated after *M:i:III*, *X-Men: The Last Stand,* and *Superman Returns*, good luck finding replenishment here. This Welsh outfit may dress up their songs in the latest bells and whistles to do battle with a "monstrous" villain, but SPOILER ALERT: indie rock doesn't come out on top here. *NME*'s trying to fluff up neatly packaged Kaiser Chief comparisons with these guys, but they probably

fit better on a Sam Goody shelf next to Fall Out Boy and My Chemical Romance, if they're lucky. Besides the guitar echo effects they've robbed from At the Drive-In's grave and a stutter-stepping, almost post-punk breakdown, this track's got little going on. The melody's basically a quarterback cadence, the lyrics borrow teaser trailer cant, and by the final scene, it sounds like the band has kidnapped, tortured, and exploded rock music.

Stream: The Automatic: Monster
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Thu: 07-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Slits
"Slits Tradition"
[2006]
★★★★

Don't call it a nostalgia trip: if this track is any indication, then the return of the Slits has more in common with Wu-Tang, grime, and the Tricky tracks that don't suck than anything involving their former contemporaries not named Mark Stewart. In other words, this is some cavernous, sleazy-sounding stuff, even if Ari Up's pimping some Helen Reddy-esque polemic. Ari strikes a different vocal pose for each verse she raps, including one where she sounds like a burnt-out Dälek. Meanwhile, her haunting coo flutters in the background between the sharp drum-machine beats and the incessant rumbling bass as a group of family and friends chant the chorus, which is about, um, Slits tradition. Of course, "Slits Tradition" proves that there is no such thing as Slits tradition.
Posted by David Raposa in post-punk on Wed: 07-26-06: 02:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Holy Shit
"Written All Over Your Face"
[2006]
★★★★

Ariel Pink's brand of cannibalized radio pop has always struck me as better in theory than practice. Animal Collective endorsements aside, Pink's gratuitously lo-fi production makes listening to his songs like digging for buried treasure-- wouldn't you rather just have the gold without all the mud? But on this track by Holy Shit, his collaboration with Matt Fishbeck of the Push Kings, Pink preserves the spirit of his four track recordings while dispensing with the hiss and murk.

Over sprays of hi-hat, hand claps, and a tangle of jangly guitars, Fishbeck piles up vague threats like "Keep every little scrap of paper" and the non-sequitur kiss-off, "If every single house should crumble, baby, I'll be waving bye-bye." Like Stephin Merritt or Edwyn Collins, Holy Shit disguise all that bitterness in the song's saccharine melodies and jaunty tempo. By the song's finale, though, the coded slights become a little more direct, as Fishbeck repeatedly laments, "I don't have to ask you, it's written all over your face." Unlike Pink in his solo material, Holy Shit take that lesson in candid expression to heart here, flaunting a straightforward pop flair on this great, unsullied tune.

Posted by John Motley in indie rock on Wed: 07-26-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Future Bible Heroes
"Mr. Punch"
[2006]
★★★
So wait, was recording this track as the Gothic Archies far too obvious? For the Neil Gaiman tribute album *Where's Neil When You Need Him?*, Stephen Merritt instead dusts off his intermittent collaboration with Chris Ewen and celebrates the nightmarish graphic novel *The Comical Tragedy or Tragical Comedy of Mr. Punch*. Though it can't match the disturbing loom of Dave McKean's collage art, it's a fittingly creepy treatment, dueting Claudia Gonson's Vincent Price enunciations with a demonic "Chip 'n Dale" vocal effect. Yet the most troubling aspect of all is not the cat-across-the-piano runs or hyena screams in the background, but rather how, in spite of the haunted-house gimmicks and murderous lyrics, "Mr. Punch" still sounds like a jingle for breakfast cereal.

Posted by Rob Mitchum in indie rock on Wed: 07-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Riton Riton
“Angerman (Riton Re-Rub)”
[2006]
★★★½
Riton's remix of his own "Angerman" track-- originally released in 2004 on his unfortunately titled *Homies and Homos* full-length-- fits right into any dance party where you need a.) decent hooks and b.) rock drums. The British DJ/producer's split-single with Lindstrøm last year now seems pretty telling, especially when all the vocals on "Angerman" get smeared over the mix with echo (the drums and synth-bass are also damn close to something you'd hear in a Maurice Fulton production). Like a lot of leftfield and cosmic stuff, the track and the all-remix 12" it came from are good news for the "I only listen to real music" crowd. However, in a dark club, surrounded people who are going to be either drunk as hell or dancing their shirts off by midnight (probably both)-- man, just listen to the drums.

Posted by Dominique Leone in house on Wed: 07-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Harper Lee Harper Lee
“I Could Be Wrong”
[2006]
★★★½

Simple truths are the most essential to grasp, but critics have a way of letting them slip through their fingers, confusing them for trite, and stomping them to bloody death. Take English duo Harper Lee's namesake: "An ungainsayable endorser of the obvious," a *New Yorker* scribe sniffed of Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As if issues of race were obvious in 1960, a year when Dixiecrat electors took votes from John F. Kennedy because Southern whites deeply believed in "states' rights"-- or now. "I Could Be Wrong" is the kind of gentle indie pop song that might easily be overlooked for lack of impenetrable avant-garde pretensions or fashionable time-signature changes-- too *obvious*, Pitchfork!-- but I listen to a lot of gentle indie-pop songs, and few are this effortlessly graceful.

Keris Howard and Laura Bridge evoke the smoldering remorse of an erring lover through self-deprecation, acoustic guitars that wave in the wind like a field of wildflowers, and pitter-patter drums, for an aesthetic recalling the Field Mice or Matinée labelmates the Lucksmiths. Howard backs beautifully into his plangent chorus: "I guess that I could be wrong, but I think you will agree/ How things didn't turn out right was really down to me/ I promise I can change." A dreamy electric guitar spells out that heart-in-mouth feeling like skywriting across the arrangement's clear blue, then dissipates just as quickly.

Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Wed: 07-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Basement Jaxx Basement Jaxx
“Hush Boy”
[2006]
★★★
It was bound to happen sooner or later, the morning you woke up next to a first Jaxx single and you didn't really want to get down with it. Still pretty and sweet-smelling and you'll always want it around, but it would really have to break out the freaky shit to get any sort of rise out of you at this point. The only thing to do really is drink a little wine on Saturday night and let it dance around in that new lingerie to some mid-tempo Earth, Wind & Fire, light some candles, maybe smoke some reefer, and then fall asleep reading Terry McMillan to each other.

And in your pinot dreams, the two of you will float on clouds of sequins, eat tacos out of chocolate rollerskates, and feather each other's hair until the ecstasy overwhelms you. You will embrace it, passionately, and say, "New Basement Jaxx single, I love you as much for the things you *do* do for me as the things you *don't* do for me. You are my Xanadu." And it will say, "Hush boy," as its skull rips open, revealing the head of Dikembe Mutombo who yelps, "*if you want me for your girlfriend!*" And that's when you wake up with a total nightboner.

Posted by Peter Macia in dance on Tue: 07-25-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Poni Hoax
“Budapest”
[2006]
★★★★½

While the rest of the full-length debut from the all-male Parisian quintet Poni Hoax reads like a discerning fashionista's hipster rock mixtape, "Budapest" makes overtures to the dance and electro set. But in addition to a throbbing italo bassline, greasy disco strings, and sopping guest vocals courtesy of the wonderfully-named Olga Kouklaki, "Budapest" also teems with WWIII paranoia and end times sensuality.

Although ultimately a little more restrained, it's a slow-burning firecracker in the spirit of Soulwax's "NY Excuse". Nine times out of ten, lyrics to a track like this are incidental and exist mostly just to be repeated, but the fragments that make it out the other side of Kouklaki's anxious Eastern European stresses intact only ratchet up the creeping dread. "I may have a few contacts/ No base I could find/ The burning synagogues are lighting up all of Budapest," she finally panics, setting the table for drums and feedback squalls to crash like buildings around her. The phrase 'post-millennial tension' comes to mind. If you've ever wished for Kelley Polar, Karin Dreijer, Phoenix, and Natasha Fatale to start a band...

Stream: Poni Hoax: Budapest

Posted by Mark Pytlik in italo on Tue: 07-25-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

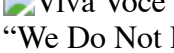
The Futureheads
“Let's Dance”
[2006]
★½

"Let's Dance" has to be the least-intimidating song to cover in David Bowie's catalog. While it's far from Bowie's creative nadir, he was definitely flirting with the commercial mainstream and divorcing himself from the drama that wrought his earlier, more forward-looking material. It's a fun 1980s song for any band to pick up and run with (which is probably why M. Ward's plaintive acoustic try seems quaint and clever instead of maudlin).

So it's the prerogative of the Futureheads, who have many fun songs, to approach another fun song and ensure their version is no fun at all. The best part: The brief intro with the rush of power chords and the ascending barbershop quartet vocals. The worst: Every moment after that. The usually excellent band builds its cover not from its guitars but from short, staccato bursts of vocal harmony-- as if they were listening closely to Max Tundra's mix of their own "Decent Days and Nights" and taking those lessons nowhere. Remember how fun it was to sing at the top of your lungs about being under serious moonlight? You will forget after hearing this. Making a song like "Let's Dance" so utterly dull is actually kind of interesting.

MP3: The Futureheads: Let's Dance

Posted by Jason Crock in indie rock on Tue: 07-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Viva Voce
“We Do Not Fuck Around”
[2006]
★★★½

"Goodbye, my love/ I've left you everything you'll need/ If I'm not back in one piece/ See, I swore to myself long ago/ That I wouldn't rest/ 'Til their heads were on my desk," sings Kevin Robinson to open this husband-and-wife duo's decidedly uncuddly tale of revenge. It sounds like a spare piano ballad in the verses, but fills out with all kinds of drums, distorted guitar, and spousal harmony vocals in the gigantic title chorus. They follow in the second chorus by staying loud and bringing in a strobing synthesizer solo, and it all tumbles down to a quiet, deftly played piano outro. For a six-minute song, it feels remarkably short, like it easily could have withstood about a dozen more choruses and a couple more verses. But hey, there's always the repeat button.

MP3: Viva Voce: We Do Not Fuck Around
Posted by Joe Tangari in indie pop on Tue: 07-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The 1900s The 1900s
“Bring the Good Boys Home”
[2006]
★★★

Let's not ignore the Elephant 6 in the room: The 1900s sound like a bunch of other bands in your CD collection, exhibiting a predictable nostalgia for 1960s parlor pop in all its fussiness and perfectionism. So what makes this Chicago sextet (now an octet) any different from all the other likeminded bands out there? Judging from "Bring the Good Boys Home", off their debut EP *Plume Delivery*, the 1900s' chief distinguishing feature may be their collective gift for witty arrangements.

After a ho-hum intro that I keep mistaking for A.C. Newman whenever it comes up on my iPod, Caroline Donovan sings an undistinguished verse, but her vocals sound delectably dry over Michael Jasinski's organ. Then the band takes a detour into the song's hookiest section before launching unceremoniously into a lengthy, open instrumental that's part parlor jam and part plot twist. It's the tight and targeted arrangement of these individual sections, rather than the sections themselves, that gives "Bring the Good Boys Home" its hummability and sets the band apart, however superficially, from its contemporaries.

MP3: The 1900s: Bring the Good Boys Home
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Tue: 07-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Clipse Clipse
“Wamp Wamp (What It Do) [ft. Slim Thug]”
[2006]
★★★½

Why did Foxy have to go and get her hearing back? Thanks to her "miraculous" recovery, Clipse may now have to give this in-demand beat-- originally intended for the Ill Na Na-- back. Deemed an automatic smash by some shadowy hip hop oracle (probably the same baby genius who thought "Can I Have It Like That" was the next "Hot In Herre"), the much-touted instrumental half-pops like a calypso remix of N.O.R.E.'s "Super Thug". It's a bit haughty for Clipse, and the lack of dissonance doesn't, uh, jive exactly. But the boys keep cracking wise nonetheless, and stick it to the Neptunes' staccato blips with the aid of a hulking Slim Thug, perfectly positioned for hooky nonsense.

When Push initiates with "No hotter flow dropper since Poppa," nobody's blinking. And when Mal leans on stereotypes to describe his necessary materials with "Mildew-ish, I heat it, it turns bluish/ It cools to a tight wad-- the Pyrex is Jewish," nobody's offended. Few twists are added to the game, but when fiendish customers are a "line outside full of Jo Jo Dancers," the same old is sufficient. Let's face it, at this point, the hype behind *Hell Hath No Fury* is basically insurmountable. To wit, as just any new rap song, I'll take "Wamp Wamp" all day; as the big one from *HHNF*, I can take it or leave it.

Stream: Clipse: Wamp Wamp (What It Do) [ft. Slim Thug]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Mon: 07-24-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Decemberists The Decemberists
“The Island: Come and See / The Landlord's Daughter / You'll Not Feel the Drowning”
[2006]
★★★★

Colin Meloy wasn't lying when he said that the Decemberists' forthcoming Capitol debut would have more in common with the band's 2004 18-minute epic *The Tain* than last year's *Picaresque*. On *The Crane Wife*'s 12-minute, three-part second track, Meloy leads his fellow seafarers to a *Lost*-ish island, where he kills somebody.

Along the way they meet classic rock swagger, thunderstorm sound effects, tender acoustic strumming, jangly parts, distorted parts, and about 20 different melodies. The words "bayonet," "arabesque," "cormorants," and "ziggurat" are used, as is "LAA-AAAAAH!" sung by Meloy in the closest he's ever come to full-on hair metal falsetto. And then there are the swirly sci-fi keyboard scales underpinning the whole thing, like it's all a dystopian vision of the future as imagined in 1971.

Colin Meloy's first band: Tarkio.

Emerson Lake & Palmer's second album: *Tarkus*.

Coincidence? Or *cosmic significance*??? Only the ten-story-tall Moog knows for sure.
Posted by Amy Phillips in indie prog on Mon: 07-24-06: 10:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Yeah Yeah Yeahs Yeah Yeah Yeahs
“Cheated Hearts (Peaches Remix)”
[2006]
★
As if to remind us that what they are now doing is definitely not what they were doing when they started, the YYYs tapped dear Peaches to remix "Cheated Hearts" all electroclash stylee, which strangely results in a Fischerspooner song-- an old one. Quick, make an outfit out of electrical tape.

It is quite possible that this is a joke, though. The most *Fever*-ish of their *Show Your Bones* songs, the original "Cheated Hearts" stands out because it's the one that sounds like acquiescence to expectations. It's "Maps" and "Y Control" knocked out with one big rock sitting in the middle of the album. So, for the remix, of course the band would enlist har-har superstar Peaches to whip up a schlocky, synth-driven nod to their days of hype and poses. To drive it home, the song contains two slow, thumping builds-- with Karen's repeated "I'm bigger than the sound" line as the hook-- that conclude with totally anti-massive giddyup synth solos. Get it? I bet celebrity DJs do.

Posted by Peter Macia in electroclash on Mon: 07-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Marco Bailey Marco Bailey
“Bollocks (Gabriel Ananda Remix)”
[2006]
★★★★½
It's like I just got off the plane in Miami, and already I can feel that hotness in the air that sticks to this place like sequined bras to showgirls beside dudes who look like gangsters, strolling down the street to the club, clean as a motherfucker. Veteran house producer Bailey gets his socks painted by Ananda, a very hot commodity right now (especially after last year's "Ihre Persönliche Glücksmelodie"), who turns a nice little tune into a dreamy, sensational anthem. The gradual build-- with those angelic chords sneaking up from the floor-- explodes like fireworks into the main body of the track, with what sounds like some kind of wooden percussion creating a syncopated countermelody and the hi-hats going off like fountains. This track would be nice to mix (the climaxes are as big as anything going), but in truth, it's a world unto itself; get high, hop in, have fun.
Posted by Dominique Leone in house on Mon: 07-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Montt Mardié Montt Mardié
“1969”
[2006]
★★★½
As its title suggests, Montt Mardié's "1969" is a heavily nostalgic single. A cross between a white-soul workout and a "What I Want to be When I Grow Up" grade school essay, the song looks back to a time when Stax was still around and "astronaut" was a viable career option, evoking an out-of-time sensibility in its lyrics and music. David Pagmar, the creative force and falsetto behind Montt Mardié, wishes he could have witnessed that first

moonwalk and bought an Otis Redding 45, and the unassuming earnestness of his lament over being born 14 years too late gives the song considerable charm beyond its slightly fussy formality. Even though Pagmar seems a little sad that both pop music and NASA aren't a little more adventurous these days, "1969" is all about the bittersweet impossibility of re-creating the past through any means other than song.

MP3: Montt Mardi: 1969
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Mon: 07-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Hold Steady
"Southtown Girls"
[2006]
★★★★

It takes an anthem to close a gig out right and send the kids home high-fiving and humming that soaring chorus. Closing out the Hold Steady's third long-player, *Boys and Girls in America*, "Southtown Girls" does just that. After wassailing through nine barroom rompers and a ballad, the boys give the revelers some room to breathe, entering with a simple, ebb-and-flow guitar riff, then staccato piano pecks, then inobtrusive organ. Beginning the whole thing a cappella, singer Craig Finn foregoes the keen observational humor and referential witticisms to deliver some plain truths-- and, holy snakes, some actual singing.

"Southtown girls won't blow you away/ But you know that they'll stay," he belts, reminding us to skip the flash and take heart in the sure things. It's a fitting valedictory message from these trend-buckers, who aren't exactly trying to reinvent the windmill-- just inject a winning rock formula with a jolt of charisma. If you aren't singing along with your glass in the air by the end of this one, you've probably already passed out.

Posted by Matthew Solarski in indie rock on Fri: 07-21-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tom Petty
"Big Weekend"
[2006]
★★★

Tom Petty really hasn't changed much over the last thirty years, and certainly not over the last ten. "Big Weekend", from his third solo album (the one with the horrid cover), has a shopworn acoustic strum that's as comfortable as a favorite workshirt, undergirded with a modified two-step rhythm. The two-part chorus is another stab at "Yer So Bad" or "The Last DJ" or any number of Petty songs. But the overfamiliarity doesn't really matter.

Shooting for lower-to-middle class escapism along the lines of Loverboy's "Working for the Weekend" or, gack, Sheryl Crow's "All I Wanna Do", "Big Weekend" is meant to appeal to every 9-to-5er with a radio at her desk, turned low so as not to get shit from the boss. Amazingly, it hits that target squarely, mainly because Petty, less scrutinized than Springsteen and less arty/conflicted than Mellencamp, sees no difference, class or otherwise, between himself and his listeners.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in rock on Fri: 07-21-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lambchop
"Paperback Bible"
[2006]
★★★★

Among the band's many virtues, Lambchop know how to open an album: Like "Interrupted" or "The Old Gold Shoe", or even "The Daily Growl", "Paperback Bible" is a curious start: a seven-minute flea market epic that touches on such serious topics as goats, puppies, prom dresses, and handguns. The set-up is impenetrable-- I've listened to it several times and can't figure out if it's an estate sale or a real flea market or a simple spring

cleaning-- but it's not hard to hear a particular pathos behind Kurt Wagner's ruminative vocals and descriptive lyrics, which make mountains out of mundanity.

These everyday objects, like rocking chairs and bibles and kitchen safes and even the hunting rifles, are poignant reminders of human experiences, big moments largely forgotten among all the mental bric-a-brac. As Wagner rummages, the band creates a simple, mostly stationary backdrop: a steadily fluttering acoustic guitar and Tony Crow's elegant piano runs, firing like loose thoughts. "Paperback Bible" ends not with a revelation, but with a slow fade-out that lasts over a full minute, capping a song that's just as curious as any of the objects Wagner lists.

Stream: Lambchop: Paperback Bible
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie rock on Fri: 07-21-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Scanners Scanners
"Lowlife"
[2006]
★★★½
For a band sharing its name with the sci-fi flick that brought us the most famous exploding head scene ever, Scanners' music not only eschews blood and guts gore, it avoids even the slightest speck of dirt. Although the quartet rubs elbows with England's post-punk ilk, this ditty's rooted rather firmly in today's conventional, manner-minding indie pop. Skipping along on a baby Built to Spill riff, Sarah Daly backs up the Chrissie Hynde comparisons with an emotionally strong and confident delivery, and those majestic strings in the chorus only help enhance the Hynde likeness. As garden variety as this track is, 2006 hasn't seen too much straightforward indie done so effortlessly-- maybe that's why Daly sounds like she's howling "this is alone" over and over.

MP3: Scanners: Lowlife
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Fri: 07-21-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cale Parks Cale Parks
"Wet Paint"
[2006]
★★★
This is a crystal bead curtain of a song-- it shimmers and goes nowhere, but it's eerily entrancing. Cale Parks previews his solo debut with a set of textures layered upon each other, including organ, drums, and his strangled, high voice repeating a single lyric a few times. Those vocals-- plus the synth chords that swell and contract like an iris-- evoke a 1970s fusion-style futurism, like something off a German prog record with a title like *Das Tangerine Post-Human Abstract*. Instrumentally, Dosh isn't a bad comparison, though Parks' main gig, Aloha, comes a lot closer: this is what you'd get if you distilled the neon liquid out of that band's music and poured it into one small container.

MP3: Cale Parks: Wet Paint
Posted by Chris Dahlen in indie rock on Fri: 07-21-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ensemble A-Side: Ensemble
"Disown, Delete [ft. Cat Power]"
B-Side: Ensemble
"Disown, Delete (Tim Hecker Remix) [ft. Cat Power]"
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★★
B-Side: ★★★★
Ensemble's Olivier Alary knows how to drape wispy electronic drones behind vocals-- his 2000 debut was a collaboration with singer Chanelle Kimber, and he's since written with and remixed Björk. Here he wraps velveteen synthetic strings and a lazy acoustic strum around an angelic Chan Marshall, creating a lush drama in miniature that you want to hear echoing inside an intimate black box. The song at first isn't quite the cabaret weeper it wants to be, with a melody that drifts aimlessly in parallel to the pinches of feedback that fill the cracks in the background. But it finds its footing and grows more assured with each bar, and after repeated listens its

odd shape lodges squarely in my brain after all. Throughout, Chan sounds like an artist in full command of her gift.

Tim Hecker was certainly the right guy for the remix, seizing on the spikiest bits of the original and beating them into a fine digital mist that refracts the light just so. Could be a track off *Mirages*, really, but Jesus-- when you make out the smallest fragments of the voice, hovering just on the level of perception, way back there behind the neo-gamelan bells, it's almost overwhelming. It wouldn't mean nearly as much without knowing the original first, since the tone of the phrasing in specific segments of the song wouldn't have the same associations, but playing with memory in this manner is Tim Hecker's specialty.

Posted by Mark Richardson in ambient electronic on Thu: 07-20-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Heartthrob Heartthrob
“Baby Kate”
[2006]
★★★★½
The opening track from the recent Minus label comp *min2MAX* comes courtesy of Michigan-born, Paris-based upstart Heartthrob, and it's a doozy. Beginning with an empty, percolating riff that sounds kind of like a whale impersonating a telegraph machine, "Baby Kate" is a bonanza of brittle micro-rhythms, filter sweeps, and variations on that quavering intro. Although his output is limited to a few odds and sods on Minus, Heartthrob comes off like a master of the build, subtly upping each refrain's momentum until the rhythmic rushes and vertiginous melodies finally reach full peak. Unlike a lot of minimal, this sounds like it was made for airplane hangars rather than headphones; in other words, there's enough negative space here to swallow thousands of potential Jonahs.
Posted by Mark Pytlik in minimal house on Thu: 07-20-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Def Leppard Def Leppard
“Waterloo Sunset”
[2006]
★½
I know everybody these days acts like they've always liked Def Leppard, what with the metal revival and irony's insatiable fashionism, but I never exactly had the AquaNet-brained chunk-rockers pegged as Ray Davies fans. On their U.S. top 20-charting covers album, the English quintet tackle sentimental "Waterloo Sunset", from 1967's *Something Else by the Kinks*. It's one of my favorite Kinks songs, but while Def Leppard's results are always technically competent, they're tarted up with hammy production in a ProTools-era take on the band's lacquered hard rock glory days, here as gloriously bronzed and fritzed as a CNN host.

The original's closing harmonies bookend this rendition, sounding a bit like Mike Love's "Kokomo" Boys in their gooey hill-scaling. Quaint acoustic guitars and "sha-la-la"s are replaced by car-radio-ready distortion and frilly lead-guitar licks left over from late-'80s power ballads like "Love Bites". Def Leppard may be nostalgic for the song's pastoral England or for their own commercial peak, but their "Waterloo Sunset" is weirdly like Los Angeles invading their native Sheffield: peroxide-laden, petrol-spewing, and superficially intriguing-- but ultimately pretty ridiculous.

Posted by Marc Hogan in glam metal on Thu: 07-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Mars Volta The Mars Volta
“Viscera Eyes”
[2006]
★½
Everyone, whether they know it or not, has at least one friend from high school who shits themselves every time the Mars Volta release something new. Well, prepare the Pampers, because this baby fuses the Volta's 21st century prog-opera with another high school varsity favorite: Rage Against the Machine. Omar Rodriguez-Lopez

lathers a hulking pentatonic riff with layers of DigiTech'd wah-wahs, blips, and beeps, the whole thing so unwieldy it requires two entries to fit on a MySpace page. Meanwhile, Cedric Bixler Zavala reverts to his Spanglish bit, belting "¿Qué pasa?" before clumsily weaving some obscure eight-syllable medical condition into poetry. In other words, it's standard fare for these guys, with a bonus package of meat-headed riffage at no extra cost.

Stream: The Mars Volta: Viscera Eyes
Posted by Adam Moerder in prog rock on Thu: 07-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Acid House Kings
“Come Josephine”
[2006]
★★★

Listening to Acid House Kings can feel like being an outsider at an intimate gathering of friends: The conversation is peppered with unfamiliar names that nobody thinks to explain. On "This Heart is a Stone", Julia Lannerheim alludes to all sorts of shared history with a certain "Caroline," but the character remains unspecific. Similarly, the first AHK song written by Lannerheim introduces an archetypal "Josephine," who discovers the semantic distinction between an endless summer and an interminable one when her seasonal romance goes sour.

Lannerheim's voice is baby-powder-fine, while her bandmates deck out a frothy acoustic progression with heavenly chimes and a sleepy guitar solo. The balance of tenderness, sorrow, and banality is textbook Kings; one wonders why these geniuses of the trite bother to make up names for their generic characters. Was "Come Julia" just too obvious?

Posted by Brian Howe in indie pop on Thu: 07-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ratatat
“Wildcat”
[2006]
★★★★

Ratatat's four-minute bursts of glitter and pyrotechnics can impel even the pithiest of writers to Spiro Agnew-caliber adjective abuse, and each adjective walks hand in hand with its foil. "Wildcat", a tensely chilled-out creeper, is no exception. It's concise and expansive, hard rock and hip hop, pop and prog, mechanical and lush. Subtle yet overstated: In case the title doesn't sufficiently establish the track's domain, fierce panther snarls periodically slash through the sleek pounce.

Of course, all this dense neon foliage comprises a dual image, sprawling city and untamed wilds equally teeming with life. Dreamy electro shimmers blur through the percussion's spitting rain; a flashy guitar lick stutters and weeps; rubber-band bass smartly stretches and retracts. Revving whooshes and echoing flutters puff up like turf under high-velocity turns. And that's just the first half, before a banner-waving synth lead and ripped funk rhythm crank up, and the jungle bursts into flames.

Stream: Ratatat: Wildcat
Posted by Brian Howe in indie rock on Wed: 07-19-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Young Jeezy
“I Do This”
[2006]
★★★

The backlash against trap music is well underway (Expect the backlash against the backlash soon). Our man from Atlanta's already weathering a squall of message-board hate, the impressionable crowds lobbing lazy digs like "Young Cheesy," "the Snowman is melting," and "Atlanta, more like Fatlanta, amirite?" Fact is, "I Do This"

is solidly crafted, and crackling over airwaves and mixtapes as we speak. Here the laconic title belies production reaching for the ghetto-operatic-- and not Kanye's feel-good sampledelia, either: we're talking stark drum machines knocking against dogged string stabs, with Jeezy's punchlines leisurely tossed over the stagey desolation.

Whether it's hustler's fatigue or natural Southern pacing, Jeezy's harrowed, arcing syllables-- with those inertial, rack-stretched *yeahs* cribbed from MC Eiht-- are still armor-piercing. What needs to change isn't the topic: cocaine, like heartache and wanderlust, is an eternal human subject. To keep his Certified Authentic seal *and* keep his sound market-fresh, Jeezy just needs new ways to relay his old habits, to mine and embroider and flesh out the pusherman experience, in all its tragic-ethical grandeur. Otherwise he'll be the next Mike Jones.

Stream: Young Jeezy: I Do This
Posted by Roque Strew in hip hop on Wed: 07-19-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Thunderbirds Are Now! Thunderbirds Are Now!
“Panthers in Crime”
[2006]
★★½

Of course this is the album opener: sleigh bells and sticky harmonies pilfer Brian Wilson's "Our Prayer" or Animal Collective's "College" and you think maybe TAN! has gone Grizzly Bear-pretty on the new one. But not so. The keyboard smears are the *real* intro, and then Thunderbirds drop what might as well be a leftover from *Justamustache*. Compared to the call-response guitar choking of *Mustache* opener "Better Safe Than Safari", however, it seems like here TAN! have spackled over their jagged edges with thick, layered guitars. Characteristically, this one's about the big chorus, but here "big" means "long" rather than "exuberant."

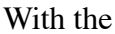
The song's message matches its sonic self-importance: "Nobody move and nobody gets paid/ What have you done with all the money you've made?" frontman Ryan Allen asks. Capital changes hands, and sometimes bands will sell a verse to make a buck. Unfortunately, solid choruses are scarcer commodities and, like good anti-capitalists, TAN! have given all of theirs away.
Posted by Jessica Suarez in indie rock on Wed: 07-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Nachtmystium Nachtmystium
“Chosen by No One”
[2006]
★★★★
When I surfed over to Battle Kommand headquarters last week, I wasn't surprsed to find a photo of Syd Barrett on the site's splash page. The label's run by Nachtmystium vocalist/guitarist Blake Judd; his band's third full-length, *Instinct: Decay*, features a sucker punch of Pink Floyd-ready guitar strata psyched with uncomfortably numb ebow sustain, albeit of a more snarling variety.

One of *Instinct: Decay*'s most impressive pieces, "Chosen by No One" covers much of the band's complex sonic spectrum in its seven minutes. Linked to neighboring tracks by a teaming, fractal noise stew, it opens with a few of the previous song's blip burps before dissolving into heroically catchy sludge riffs, doubling drum gurgles (these remain buried), and burnt guitar spew that feels like an epic city burst. The dense, swirling sound matches the marine blue-green of the album's artwork-- a verdant, shadowed underwater nightscape.

Not content with a straight-up pummel, Nachtmystium offer a few gear shifts: an escalating breakdown (drums climb a mountain; guitars plead with the gods) plugs up the opening passage, redirecting the flow into a churning thrash sea abetted by Judd's gasping, drowning choir-of-one growl. The boys could easily beeline *this* riffage to an exeunt, but the ambitious fuckers toss in yet another side-stitch, a half-frozen mosh part (as we'd call them in high school), allowing the multi-tracked psych guitars to drift even higher. Seriously, imagine Roger Waters in corpsepaint. Judd ends the toe-tapping blast with a one-man exclamation, literally hocking a loogie, before more sprung noise arcs into the next submersion.

Posted by Brandon Stosuy in metal on Wed: 07-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Peter Bjorn and John
“Young Folks [ft. Victoria Bergsman]”
[2006]
★★★

With the help of Concretes vocalist Victoria Bergsman, Sweden's comma-less Peter Bjorn and John come off like Camera Obscura with a severe case of Young Marble Gigantism, coolly propulsive and hauntingly stark. A braid of snares, bongos, maracas, and rubbery bass winds through creeping conversational verses and surging tandem choruses. PB&J's male lead sounds like a shakier Cass McCombs and tends to alight awkwardly, key-wise, at the end of lines, contrasted by Bergman's feather-soft landings.

The lens closes in on a tête-à-tête in a gradually emptying public space, the interlocutors sinking into a realization of love as the hours melt off the night and the exterior world recedes. Little flare-ups of pokerfaced anxiety, creepy whistling, faint spasms of watery guitar, and elegiac organs imbue the outwardly innocuous song with a euphemistic menace: If it isn't tinged with the abject terror of vanishing both physically and emotionally, it probably isn't love.

Stream: Peter Bjorn and John: Young Folks [ft. Victoria Bergsman]
Posted by Brian Howe in indie pop on Wed: 07-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lady Sovereign
“Love Me or Hate Me”
[2006]
★★★

Anticlimactic but sensible, the song is a debut major label single in its purest form. There's not much precedent for a slight, light limey with a ponytail in American hip-hop, after all. Blogs are on board, so it's time to ease in the masses. Signify different-yet-accepted with a beat that jumbles two recent Missy singles-- the familiar electro 808 pump of "Lose Control" plus some screwy Neptunes noises à la "On & On". Then strip personality down to the bare minimum: strange startime appearance (small breasts and ears, "nonexistent bum"), some blue collar comedy (Heineken > champagne, burps galore, "not posh"), and a little Sex Pistol spit ("I'm English, try and deport me!"). Advanced pupils can skim, sleep, or skip but, remember, even Eminem brandished a nametag at the start. The titular choice seems clear, though this *Sov for Dummies* wannabe salvo is not built for extremes.

MP3: Lady Sovereign: Love Me or Hate Me
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Tue: 07-18-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cut Chemist
“Storm [ft. Edan and Mr. Lif]”
[2006]
★★★

The intro is way too long, as though Cut Chemist couldn't decide which sample he wanted to use and so used them all, but once it gets going, "Storm" is a diverting electro track. Cut subverts the piles of globe-trotting samples that dominate much of the rest of *The Audience's Listening* in favor of an old-school Bronx beat complete with back-masked snare and laser noises. Edan and Mr. Lif make the simple beat their playground, but I wish they were mixed a bit higher, because they're occasionally obscured by little bursts of people shouting or some Caribbean orchestra playing three notes or even the beat itself.

Edan begins his verse "crush kill mutilation blood blood" and then dives into a GMAT vocabulary lesson, but he's overshadowed by Lif, whose verbal diarrhea is in such full flourish that he raps right past what Cut seems to have originally thought was the end. "Officially it's only my mind that limits me/ And lately I've been having

visions of infinity" is an uncommonly thoughtful boast, one of a few key lines that elevates this beyond simple throwback pleasure.

Stream: Cut Chemist: Storm [ft. Edan and Mr. Lif]
Posted by Joe Tangari in hip hop on Tue: 07-18-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lupe Fiasco
"I Gotcha"
[2006]
★★★½
Take for granted the fifth-gear Maserati flow, the super-thin Cartier rims, and the Jay co-sign, and you're left with the number one reason why Lupe is still the 2006 debut to beat: brain-pop onion-peel raps. See: "Welcome all of y'all to my dark recesses/ This is where I keep the bars like bathtub edges." Most would stop there, satisfied with slicing through a couple language layers with a single hot line. Not Lupe. So much white it'll hurt your eyes: "My Ivorys and my Doves, my Levers and my Zest-es/ It takes half of your bubble bath to match the freshness/ ...And I be on my green like Irish Spring/ Then I Coast-- fudge with it, get a mouth full of soap." All this after an entire verse expounding on how "flagrantly fragrant" Lupe is. Clean, clean, clean.

Such enthralling thematic stubbornness and rampant wit puts a pause on the eye-roll when he later aims to resurrect hip hop while deriding pimps and mobsters. But, if he really wants to spread his no-cuss gospel, he's going to have to get past the internet and the ollies. That's where Pharrell and Chad come in, goosing his chances with a mid-tempo slider that's like Kanye's "Get By" beat with a beginner on the keys. Like nearly everything Lupe's weaved through, the music doesn't match the rhymes. Maybe it can't.

Stream: Lupe Fiasco: I Gotcha
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Tue: 07-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Isolée
"I Owe You (Villalobos Remix)"
[2006]
★★★½

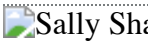
And down the rabbit hole we go: issued on the recent Playhouse 12" *The Western Edits Part 2*, "I Owe You (Villalobos Remix)" finds everybody's favorite Chilean techno pointillist rearranging the furniture on Isolée's own remix of his 1999 original. Although two degrees removed from the source, Ricardo's interpretation retains the slowed-down, narcoticized lead vocal that-- let's be honest-- sounds pretty much exactly like living world dispatches as heard from the wrong end of a k-hole. Everything else, from the frothy synth melodies to the pattering microhouse rhythms, appears remade in his own image. And in true Villalobos style, he's stretched what was once a six minute track into fifteen, thereby taking the long route into our subconcious. Subtle, minutely detailed, and relentless, this is one of those that's meant to wash right over you.

Posted by Mark Pytlik in minimal house on Tue: 07-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Shout Out Louds
"I Meant to Call"
[2006]
★★½

He meant to call, but he didn't. That's the gist of this wisp of a song from the Shout Out Louds' new between-albums EP, *Combines*. The band traces a small moment-- a broken promise, a sincere regret-- and allows it to remain small; it's a little more affecting for being a little more humdrum. Maintaining a gently racing tempo, the guitar descends like a bassline and the bass pummels along like a kickdrum, while Adam Olenius sings in a voice just above a whisper. Everyone remains subservient to the beat, which samples the clack of billiard balls-- "I Meant to Call"'s best feature. The mood is as dreamy as the chorus is catchy, but ultimately, the song still feels a little insubstantial, not unlike most forgotten-phonecall excuses.

Stream: Shout Out Louds: I Meant to Call
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Tue: 07-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Sally Shapiro
“I'll Be By Your Side”
[2006]
★★★★½

If Sally Shapiro sounds tentative, it's because she never intended on singing. As the story goes, pal and fledgling Swedish producer Johan Agebjörn was so struck by Shapiro's demure caroling voice that he set to the studio and whipped this up specifically for her. A shimmery slice of disco with a chorus that would have killed at Eurovisions '81 through '86, "I'll Be By Your Side" (reputedly written in two hours) is such a distilled and convincing homage to italo's golden era that it takes real effort to come to terms with the fact it was actually recorded earlier this year.

Agebjörn's pinpoint synth stabs, 8-bit drums, and chilly, melodic breakdowns wheedle goosebumps, but ultimately it's Shapiro's barely-there choirgirl vocal that sells this as a mislaid pearl from the 45 bin in the attic. What does it say about us that it's so hard to believe someone could sound so unaffected in 2006? Lost classic, no-- just 25 years deferred.

Posted by Mark Pytlik in italo disco on Mon: 07-17-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Paris Hilton
“Turn It Up”
[2006]
★½

If Paris's musical career resembles anyone's at all, it's latter-day 50 Cent. "Turn It Up" is essentially the next G-Unit single. The track, produced by the elegantly retarded Scott Storch, features her catchphrase "That's hot" (much like 50's "It's 50") in the opening seconds and dabbles in G-Unit's static mediocrity. Careening synths, triple-tracked vocals, symphonic progressions that end in reliably predictable crescendos-- it's all there. But people are going to like it. Storch is stunningly capable of muting his formidable skills for the price of chart success, and he's frank about that. Surely he realizes, however, that his bid to turn a shipping heir's former dog toy into Madonna (clearly the end game here) is an unworkable situation. He may be distracted by all the adamantium anchors he's selecting for his yacht.

Hilton seems to be without a singing tone above "coo," which is probably good news for everyone. Lyrically...I won't waste your time. She didn't write it and you won't care anyway. There is a moment when she says "When I lose my clothes, you like that, don't cha?" that seems to imply she's talking to someone. I'm guessing she's trying to holler at Lloyd Banks.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in pop on Mon: 07-17-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Franz Ferdinand
“Fade Together (Avalanches Remix)”
[2006]
★

The original was a pretty wisp of a song in the first place, a Beatlesque coo over halfhearted piano tinkles and barely-there acoustic guitar. It's the single most sedate moment in the entire Franz oeuvre, as if that even means anything at all. The Avalanches usually take stuff like this and turn it into junkshop cosmopolitanism, layering Egyptian jug-band drums under all the fey whimpers. But here, they take a wisp and make it even wispier, whittling Alex Kapranos's vocal down to a couple of muttered asides repeated over and over and putting enough blissed-out reverb on the piano to turn it into Robert Altman background noise. And then they toss in vinyl-pop and ambient restaurant noise, and it ceases existence as a song entirely and becomes an ephemeral snatch of

found sound. It's somehow simultaneously the most audacious and the most boring thing they could've done with it, and I don't intend to listen to it ever again.
Posted by Tom Breihan in ambient pop on Mon: 07-17-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Christian Falk Christian Falk
“Dream On [ft. Robyn and Ola Salo]”
[2006]
★★★★
Thieves and muggers, tricks and hustlers, sing with her, sing for the year, the laughter and the tears: "You won't be squealed on, ripped on tonight/ You won't be back-stabbed, double-crossed, face down, teeth knocked out, lying in a gutter somewhere." Not that these promises to the second class citizens of the world are what's going to be remembered from this song. Dance producer Christian Falk-- a contributor to Robyn's first album from last century-- concocts a gorgeous, shimmering backing track upon which Robyn and the Ark's Ola Salo rest their weary heads. Salo's understated presence allows Robyn enough room to convincingly vamp as a bonafide (albeit melisma-free) disco diva, a nurturing mother to the tired, hungry, and poor looking to do nothing more than forget their troubles and take to the dancefloor.
Video: Christian Falk: Dream On [ft. Robyn and Ola Salo]
Posted by David Raposa in dance pop on Mon: 07-17-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Modern HeadsModern Heads (a trio, including one visual artist) is out of Italy and the Elettronica Romana label, sharing a home with like minded, tranced-out techno producers like Giorgio Gigli and Donato Dozzy. This track is drone heaven, laying on its
Modern Heads
“Treatment 1 (Donato Dozzy Version)”
[2006]
★★★★
Modern Heads (a trio, including one visual artist) call Italy and the Elettronica Romana label home, along with like-minded, tranced-out techno producers like Giorgio Gigli and Donato Dozzy. This track is drone heaven, laying on its bassline from the outset, and subtly introducing rhythmic elements as it progresses. This isn't the kind of thing I'd put on to wow visiting conventioneers, but it is the kind of thing I'd put on to hypnotize guests so we didn't have to keep talking about the club where their friend got busted. Like some of Gigli's stuff from this year, it's a track that makes it very easy to stare off into the distance, looking for spirals and tracing the outlines of invisible electromagnetic fields in the air. And I guess that makes it a pretty good trance tune.
Posted by Dominique Leone in techno on Mon: 07-17-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

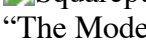
The Killers The Killers
“When You Were Young”
[2006]
★★
When Brandon Flowers said the new Killers album was aiming for a Springsteen sound, just about everyone had to laugh. Sure Brandon, and I wanna be a firetruck when I grow up! But gol-ly, these shapeshifting clowns have pulled off an E Street likeness, save for some leftover synths from *Hot Fuss*. Without even listening to this mini-Boss offering, there's a lot to hate here. Flowers has been waxing majestic over the upcoming *Sam's Town*, dubbing it one of the last two decades' greatest albums already, and now he's got the chutzpah to hijack Bruce's American dream and its soundtrack.

This ain't no popularity contest though, and I'll welcome any Killers song that breaks their locked-in new wave mold. Unfortunately, the nasally Flowers sounds like Todd Rundgren fronting the New E Street Band, and there's no bring-the-hammer-down hook to sanctify its anthem status. If the contrived rough-and-tumble lyrics sound ridiculous-- "we're burnin' down the highway skyline/ on the back of a hurricane"-- it's because Bruce's were equally garish, but there was legit working class pathos behind them, whereas the Killers' Las Vegas glam doesn't mesh well with red, white, and blue. In other words, this baby's a stillborn, not born to run.

Stream: The Killers: When You Were Young
Posted by Adam Moerder in pop rock on Fri: 07-14-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Teddybears
"Yours to Keep [ft. Neneh Cherry and Annie]"
[2006]
★★★★

From ABBA to Ace of Base to Robyn, when it comes to the poppinest pop, Sweden uber alles. This fluffy confection belies the hardcore punk (as in "oi! oi!") roots of the group that concocted it, zipping along like a Vespa running on a refined version of the Strokes' lockstep motorik groove. Swede Neneh Cherry graces this particular stage and softens her buffalo stance, coyly suggesting that she's open to someone getting fresh with her (if you want to). And repping neighboring Norway, that's Annie cooing somewhere in the background, in case you missed her. But the kicker about this track, set to appear on Teddybears' forthcoming stateside debut? It's six years old (check the original version here). Going back to the future has rarely seemed this timely.
Posted by David Raposa in indie pop on Fri: 07-14-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Squarepusher
"The Modern Bass Guitar"
[2006]
★★★½

Here we have Tom Jenkinson jamming with himself, playing theme and variations upon variations upon something that would have sounded a lot like the nü-RIO/brutal-prog show I saw last night were he using anything other than that break. Yet, you still have to marvel at this guy. It's funny, because twenty years ago, he might have been edging at the sit-down-only "Live at Red Rocks" consumer base, but right now he actually seems a lot harder than most of his bill-mates (not to mention his fellow IDM alums).

This track from the forthcoming *Hello Everything* (now streaming at Warp's website) is almost certain to please longtime fans-- it's very much in the lineage of his perceived stock in trade, with Atari-ready melodies and loops of "Amen" to fill out any form bouncing around in Jenkinson's head. However, if you're wanting always new and better from him...well, you may have a point, because as essentially an improvising composer, there really aren't any formal limits on what the man can come up with. It's all been proven by science, you see. Anyway, the track is cool enough.

Stream: Squarepusher: The Modern Bass Guitar
Posted by Dominique Leone in IDM on Fri: 07-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Rick Ross
"Blow [ft. Dre]"
[2006]
★★★½

Contrary to hater-instincts, we here at Pitchforkmedia Inc. don't get righteous boners every time a rapper mentions cocaine in a song (Lil Wayne excepted). In the cases of guys like Cam, Wayne, and the Clipse, subject matter is often subordinate to their unparalleled swagger, deep-end metaphors, and ability to create several new urban dictionary entries with every verse. In contrast, Rick Ross has a certain bloated penguin swagger, but it's too second-tier outlandish to be considered an asset. He once knew what the word "metaphor" meant but has since forgotten. And his idea of wordplay is something like, "Mo' trucks (mo' trucks)/ Mo' bucks (mo' bucks)/ Mo' freaks (mo' freaks)/ Mo' butts (mo' butts)"-- basically preschool repeat-after-me riddles. Still, even this Bad News Beard can't blow "Blow", thanks to Cool & Dre's electro-shock beat, a Prince-style synth-up that marks their finest showing since "Hate It or Love It".

But, unlike that understated masterpiece, this is grandiose; if they gave *The Neverending Story* a hip hop makeover with Atreyu as the hustler with a heart of gold, this would be the soundtrack to the fly-over montage (Ross, of course, would play that rock dude). Pushing things even further is Dre, who reinforces the hook's

hacked "blow" job ("Mo' money means mo' cash to blow!") with a falsetto so foolish Pharrell wouldn't even try it on. It all adds up to a force that's-- by some miracle-- bigger than Ross himself.

Stream: Rick Ross: Blow [ft. Dre]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Fri: 07-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jessica Simpson
"A Public Affair"
[2006]
★

Kneejerk (and correct) comparisons to Madonna's "Holiday" dogpiled poor Jesse before she even had a chance to run with the ball, but let's not be trite in our judgments of the fallen newlywed. If "A Public Affair" were simply a hack off the old Madonna tree, it actually might be worth something, but instead it's just south of underfunded Eastern Bloc dance pop. Not saying Ms. Simpson wouldn't maul the Eurovision qualifying rounds were she from that region of the world, but there's no way she trumps the Finnish GWAR with this shit.

However, the real problem with this song is that, with its tinny Tiffany production clearly aimed at the underdeveloped eardrums of eight-year-old girls who have yet to discover Smoosh, the lyrics are quite whorey. For anyone with a daughter, sister, or niece of this age with an iTunes account, this is troublesome, to say the least. The last thing this country needs right now is a chorus of thousands of pigtailed little girls singing about staying up all night and shaking it for some slightly-hunkier Dane/Lachey mongrel-dreamboat with an open bar tab and a shirt with weird cuffs. Of course, if this isn't directed at toddlers and instead aims for the negligible sub-pop of Patrón-slugging, shopaholic tanorexics and their attendant girlfriends, then it just might be the most perfect vacuum created since that lispy Brit's Tonka-sucker.

Stream: Jessica Simpson: A Public Affair
Posted by Peter Macia in pop on Fri: 07-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Jason Molina
"Get Out Get Out Get Out"
B-Side: Magnolia Electric Co.
"Lonesome Valley"
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★½
B-Side: ★★½

These latest Jason Molina offerings showcase the two distinct sides of his personality: One is the type of classic rock track that confirms those Shakey comparisons; the other, a deep, dark acoustic musing in the Songs: Ohia vein. On "Lonesome Valley", the Magnolia Electric Co. chairman sounds like he's scoring an old Western in his head with rumbling guitars, thwacking drums, and a jumpy barroom piano. It's a lush, full-band sound, an extension of Magnolia's previous travails, and for a while it suits his voice nicely. But about 30 seconds in, he's done everything with that sound that he's going to do, and the last three minutes just protract those ideas, never really taking off or rocking out.

"Get Out Get Out Get Out" is quieter and more spartan than "Lonesome Valley", but sounds louder. More than the meager guitar strums and simple drum beats, and more than even Molina's invested vocals, which make the word "mast" sound like a dying breath, the silent, empty spaces-- filled with the ambient buzz of the recording equipment-- give the song its formidably dark mood and grave power. Maybe Molina's singing about a soured relationship on both of these songs, or maybe-- more likely-- he's expressing a general mortal lament: perhaps the only way to escape the oppression of life is to leave it entirely.

And that's the big difference between these two songs: On "Lonesome Valley" Molina just wants to run from his problems, but on "Get Out" he sounds like he's facing something completely inescapable.

MP3: Jason Molina: Get Out Get Out Get Out
MP3: Magnolia Electric Co.: Lonesome Valley

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie rock on Thu: 07-13-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Morgan Geist Morgan Geist
“Most of All [ft. Jeremy Greenspan]”
[2006]
★★★

Synthesizers don't come much brighter than on Morgan Geist's new single, "Most of All"; the colors of spun gold, sour honey, and fritzy neon, they're almost unbearably luminous-- shiveringly so, far more than on any of the Metro Area member's other slices of italo-techno-funk. That is, until Junior Boys' Jeremy Greenspan drops his voice like a pair of shades and some judicious Rhodes throws shadows amid the track's underbrush, where clarinets (not really) and a stubby bassline forage and strut, bearing their truffles like trophies.

Jeremy's hardly guarded, though, lying naked in his bed and dreaming of his object of desire: "I know that I'm in love with you/ Most of all," he sings. "It makes me want to..."-- and here's where we lose the thread, because while "call" would be the natural fit, it sure sounds like he's saying "crawl." And since the backing track's too sweet for masochism, we're left with some kind of infantilization fantasy that is, to say the least, odd. Good thing Area man's disco/pop (proportions vary depending upon volume) backing is truly a soothing sound for baby; there are even countryish slide-guitar sounds for playing horsey, and a bumping conclusion that takes us out on a "ZOOM" tip.

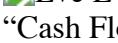
Posted by Philip Sherburne in electro pop on Thu: 07-13-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Camera Obscura Camera Obscura
“Modern Girl”
[2006]
★★★½

Fresh on the rubber-sole heels of Belle and Sebastian's peroxide-era Rod Stewart cover, Glaswegian peers Camera Obscura tackle 1980s pop diva Sheena Easton, herself a fellow Scot. Tracyanne Campbell and her group take an approach similar to the one used by B&S for "Baby Jane", replacing Thatcher-pressed synth-pep with languorous guitar, beer-buzzed organ, and Campbell's casual, pensive vocals.

Lucky for Camera Obscura, "Modern Girl" holds up as the better of the two originals: It's a well-crafted pop song about the way promiscuous boys have played women's lib to their own selfish advantage, and the bittersweet loneliness that entails for the girls. "I don't build my world 'round no single man/ I am getting by doing what I can," Campbell half-laments. She already told us she felt like "getting confessional," and while there's much more to the enchanting *Let's Get Out of This Country* than emotional verisimilitude, "Modern Girl" also rings true. Now, about those pesky Stuart Murdoch comparisons...

Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Thu: 07-13-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Eve Eve
“Cash Flow [ft. T.I.]”
[2006]
★★½

When Eve first hit the national radar, she was a diamond-hard, street-rap goddess with no time for fools, "the illest vicious pitbull in a skirt." But it's impossible to maintain your sneer through Gwen Stefani collabos and failed sitcoms, and so it makes a whole lot of sense for her to link up with a resurgent Swizz Beats and a dominant T.I. on this, her bid to reclaim rap relevance. Swizz, however, no longer traffics in the sparkling menace he was working back when he gave Eve "What Y'all Want", and things are different here.

"Cash Flow" is a competent, efficient bit of big-budget, understated club rap: regal horns, strutting guitars, chunky drums. Everyone hits their marks: T.I. slurring effortless self-aggrandizement and Eve going back to

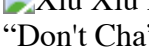
insouciant, gum-snap money-talk. But there's not a whole lot of personality here; this could be just about anyone. If Eve wants to get back to where she was, she needs to let fly with more than casually brash arrogance-- she needs to bring the fury.

Stream: Eve: Cash Flow [ft. T.I.]
Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Thu: 07-13-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ashley Monroe
“Satisfied”
[2006]
★★★★

"Satisfied" is a song about feeling crushed by the endless romantic opportunities in the world, the infinite combinations of lovers, and the awareness that each and every one of those match-ups will leave its participants at least a little unsatisfied. Even the strongest affection, Ashley Monroe suggests, can't keep lovers from thinking of the millions of people they could be with instead. This is heavy, even cynical subject matter for a debut single, but Monroe, singing in a voice you might swear was Dolly Parton's, handles the sentiment with a winning mix of confidence and vulnerability. On the bridge, she reaches into her upper register to stress the word "need," and as the instruments fall away to leave her a cappella, she bends the word into a quiet *yeah*. Effortlessly expressing equal parts dismay and awe at all the star-crossed possibilities, it's a nice moment on the latest in a line of strong country singles this year.

Stream: Ashley Monroe: Satisfied
Video: Ashley Monroe: Satisfied
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Thu: 07-13-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Xiu Xiu
“Don't Cha”
[2006]
★★★

Shudder to Think's cover of Atlanta Rhythm Section's "So Into You" opted for subversion over cheap laffs, recasting the feel-good vibe as queasy obsession. Xiu Xiu follows suit on this Excepter-like overhaul of Pussycat Dolls' "Don't Cha", simultaneously queering the song's isosceles love triangle and exhuming its cheerful message's secret miseries. The Dolls' boyfriend-baiting anthem glides through Xiu Xiu's nightmare corridor of throbbing industrial clangor, violently pistoning percussion, and hissing interference, emerging from the other side thoroughly defiled.

Jamie Stewart's throttled whimper is digitally phased and flanged to the post-mammalian brink, sounding injured-animal pathetic where the Dolls are all chutzpah. The implications of "freak" and "raw" become less patently triumphant, as sexual confidence subsides beneath jealousy and stymied desire. This is a vision of the flipside of pop's utopia, the inevitable ruin latent in human aspiration, although whether it scans as aesthetic experiment or ideological critique is completely subjective.

Posted by Brian Howe in noise on Wed: 07-12-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Richard Hawley
“Some Candy Talking”
[2006]
★★★

Sometimes a cover lets you hear something new and great, an underlying strength the original interpreter may have missed. And sometimes a cover turns out like this. Crooner Hawley's usual taste in songwriting tends toward seasoned professionals who sweat every chord change-- your Bacharachs, Walkers, Hazlewoods, and Orbisons. The Jesus and Mary Chain's Reid brothers, on the other hand, prefer the kind of tunes you write when

you've been playing guitar for a month. The original JAMC recording of "Some Candy Talking" bridged the noise assault of *Psychocandy* and the druggy acoustic turn of *Darklands*, and as usual it got by on lots of reverb and guitars that sounded just so. Hawley's straight reading is warm and inviting but shows a song WAY underwritten, something crying out for attitude or noise or at least a funny haircut to make it whole.

Posted by Mark Richardson in rock on Wed: 07-12-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Outkast Outkast [Big Boi]
"Morris Brown [ft. Scar, Sleepy Brown, and the Morris Brown College Marching Wolverines]"
[2006]
★★★

My head is slung low, shaking and muttering-- it's closing time for 'Kast. Now. Officially. And forget *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*-- the shutters are getting pulled down. Say what you will, but Big Boi kept the lights on for this franchise all by his damn self for the last three years, saying the right things in interviews, accepting Andre's creative insolence as growth, and soldiering on, making great rap records. But now, with "Morris Brown", roll credits.

Make no mistake, it's the best song Purple Ribbon flyweight crooner Scar has ever recorded. But it's Boi ceding the stage, and on a single no less, to a crew less gifted. There's plenty to be said of "Morris Brown"-- the vibrant sound of a marching band hip hop track (produced by Dre himself), Daddy Fat Sacks' flittering eloquence (dude could rap his way out of a cryonic chamber at this point), Sleepy's down-lowlowlow semi-hook-- but it's not about the song, really. *Idlewild*'s had disappointment written across it for a year now. Now that Antwan Patton is slinking off, delegating, we can turn the lights off.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Wed: 07-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jóhann Jóhannsson Jóhann Jóhannsson
"Tu Non Mi Perderai Mai"
[2006]
★★★½

I'm sort of a Jóhann Jóhannsson groupie: His *Virðulegu forsetar* still gives me goose bumps after dozens of listens, so when I visited Rekjavík, I made a pilgrimage to Hallgrímskirkja, the church where the hour-long piece debuted and was recorded. Listening now, I feel like it's better understood, the sense of place concrete in my mind's eye.

Makes sense then that Jóhannsson's contribution to *Touch 25* would be my favorite. The disc, which celebrates Touch's twenty-fifth year, includes new work from Fennesz, Oren Ambarchi, Peter Rehberg, Philip Jeck, Biosphere, and a host of others, but it's Jóhannsson who forces me to pause and press repeat (repeatedly). The nine-minute soundscape, written for a performance by Italian choreographer Raffaella Giordano, was composed for Hammond organ, ring modulator, and violin/cello. With the help of an Italian dictionary, I translated "Tu Non Mi Perderai Mai" to mean "You will never lose me." What's that sound like? Like losing someone-- an airy, scraping drone with modulations approximating fallen, smearing stars.

The compilation's a well-curated sonic collage, so "Tu Non Mi Perderai Mai" leaves its strongest impression within that context, arriving between two tracks with near-silent borders: When Jóhannsson hits his stride, it's like deep, blue projections in the middle of nowhere spelling out the names of the lonely and the dead.

Posted by Brandon Stosuy in experimental on Wed: 07-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Sammies The Sammies
"Falling Out"
[2006]
★★★½

The Sammies probably weren't even alive for post-punk, let alone punk, but what does that matter? On this energetic and infectious album track, they sound like Bloc Party or the Futureheads reincarnated as a Midwestern bar band. Drummer Donnie Yale makes his hi-hat sound ready for a fight, Gymmy Thunderbird's bass steps up disco-style to the chorus, and Murphy Upshaw's guitar is a rowdy pit of jostling elbows. Sounding a little like Mike Ness and a little like Paul Westerberg, vocalist Frank Backgammon foregoes darkly existential angst in favor of light hook-up despair, frankly admitting, "I wanna screw you tonight! I wanna be your best friend!" while the band puts the moves on that hot pop-hook chorus. "Falling Out" is just one cheeseball pick-up line away from getting into your ears' pants.

Stream: The Sammies: Falling Out

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie rock on Wed: 07-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

"And I Was a Boy From School (Erol Alkan's Extended Re-Work)"

[2006]

★★★★

Brit mixmaster Erol Alkan's been working toward this sort of transcendence for some time, announcing his arrival with barefaced mash-ups (Missy Elliott + George Michael = OMG!), then transitioning into modest remixes before blasting through with his epic re-edit of Mylo's "Drop The Pressure" in 2004. On the heels of the suddenly-requisite Daft Punk-Franz Ferdinand-Justice remix trifecta, Trash-founder Alkan does right by Hot Chip's most accomplished song to date: he lets it breathe. Stretching the assemblage long and wide one at a time-- first hi-hats and kick drum, then hand claps, then maracas, then drum machine-- Alkan lets languid rule. The 10-minute run time says as much.

Testing the patience of those anxious for falsetto, Alexis Taylor's crystalline vocals glisten under a Farfisa organ more than three minutes in, then fold away after 40 seconds. Pieced into four parts, resembling the original only after six minutes, and almost entirely without a vocal for its run time, the song is scattered from an analytical perspective. But his remixee's original is so warmly-felt and crisply drawn that an elongation only highlights its unfettered loveliness.

Stream: Hot Chip: And I Was a Boy From School (Erol Alkan's Extended Re-Work)

Posted by Sean Fennessey in dance on Tue: 07-11-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

"Red, White & Blue Lies"

[2006]

★★★

If ever Anacortes, Wash. was home to a supergroup, D+ is it. Since Bret Lunsford formed the band in the wake of Beat Happening's apparent dissolution, D+ has filled out its lineup of lo-fi royalty to include Phil Elv(e)rum (Microphones/Mount Eerie) and Karl Blau. And "Red, White & Blue Lies" is precisely what you'd expect from these three: a song that's loose and rambling, but undeniably catchy and fun. Blau hardly sounds self-conscious-- or even especially effortful-- as he sings over the sloppy duel of strummed acoustic and electric guitar. The jarringly loud distorted guitar and cymbal crashes that punctuate the chorus, meanwhile, could just as easily be mixing accidents as interesting production decisions. But, as is often the case with Elvrum and Blau, it never sounds willfully amateurish; instead, it's charmingly immediate.

In keeping with the intimacy of such modest production values, the song doesn't shoot itself in the foot with the kind of political sloganeering its title implies. Instead, D+ uses colors as metaphors for a relationship, in which "white lies" lead to anger (red) and, finally, sadness (that'd be blue). No, it's not earth-shattering or studied. But sometimes a little innocence and honesty go a long way.

Posted by John Motley in indie rock on Tue: 07-11-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Stephen Malkmus Stephen Malkmus
“METS to Infinity”
[2006]
★★

In 2001 Stephen Malkmus sat for one of *The Wire*'s Invisible Jukebox interviews. When Mike Barnes played him Kid606's remix of "Straight Outta Compton", Makmus identified the track and said: "I'm not really a knob twiddler at heart. I don't mind filtering things, picking an effect or chopping things up, but I think of it as a lesser art than writing a great song..."

This track from the *PDX Pop Now! 2006* compilation finds Malkmus twiddling knobs like Dr. Emmett "Doc" Brown on a track that sounds...lesser. A chugging "Peter Gunn" bass creeps up behind and then Malkmus' voice drunkenly enters the room backwards-- the old reverse-tape trick-- making him sound vaguely wounded and demonic as squealing synths and guitar feedback add to the queasy vibe. "Experimental," sure. But while there's a kernel of something here, an intro or sketch that could lead somewhere interesting, at a minute forty it never comes close to taking off.

Posted by Mark Richardson in indie rock on Tue: 07-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pissed Jeans Pissed Jeans
“Don't Need Smoke to Make Myself Disappear”
[2006]
★★★★

I pegged these guys as (and prayed they were) the second coming of the Jesus Lizard when I heard their previous full length, but it turns out the only real similarities are distortion and oppression. The latter is what's important on the A-side of their latest single-- and first for Sub Pop-- as Pissed Jeans ditch the gleefully raucous approach and turn in an impenetrable five-minute brick of howling desperation. It doesn't just rock, it doesn't just scare, it actually builds a mood out of its lurching, hammering drone.

It's a pretty gun-to-the-temple kind of mood, sure, but "Don't Need Smoke" is more than noise for the sake of it. What noise, though: the singer wails like Tim Roth shot in the belly, but the guitars hold back, bending and feeding back on a few scant tones, so elemental that the whole song changes if they hit more than one string. Bands like this are supposed to flail and over-exert, but the slightest move Pissed Jeans make here can crumble a city block.

Posted by Jason Crock in indie rock on Tue: 07-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bastien Grine Bastien Grine
“Step Back”
[2006]
★★★½
Bastien Grine is a stylish motherfucker. Dude himself looks stylish enough, sure, but his music steals the show: it's clean, efficient, sharp, and just minimal enough that you can never know if the void you feel is because there isn't enough happening, or because the pull from the negative space is drawing you closer to greatness. "Step Back" comes after a slightly underrated "Where R U?" 12" on K2, and is likewise ultra minimal, but with a hint of electro to make the Kraftwerk crowd hold off their indifference. However, I prefer "Step Back": it works the drone (always nice these days), and reminds me a little of the great Butane *On the Ket* 12" from last year, mixing a mini-sound palette with vaguely psychedelic, er, fields of resonance. Sorry to get all *Computer Music Journal* on you, but sometimes you have to let the music take over.
Posted by Dominique Leone in minimal house on Tue: 07-11-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jarvis Cocker Jarvis Cocker
“Running the World”
[2006]

★★★★

Live 8 inspired Cocker to pen this song, originally titled "Cunts Are Still Running the World"-- one year later, it's still depressingly accurate. It is, however, incredibly refreshing to hear someone just lay it out in such plain, profane terms: "Well did you hear there's a natural order?/ those most deserving will end up with the most/ that the cream cannot help but always rise up to the top/ well I say, shit floats." The title refrain basically bans itself from radio, but it's catchy enough to stay with you after just one listen. Jarvis' message: "In theory, I respect your right to exist/ but I'll kill you if you move in next to me." The overall pessimism here is strangely poignant, and one supposes it'll only get more poignant as the world's problems drag on.

There is some music to this thing, of course-- it sounds a lot like Pulp, actually. Big keyboards, stirring chorus (melodically at least), well-placed guitar doodles, and a semi-hilarious choir of vocoders that takes over the refrain after the second chorus. It could have easily been tossed off, but instead, Cocker's given us a great song with a reminder that the work of improving the world never ends.

Stream: Jarvis Cocker: Running the World
Posted by Joe Tangari in indie rock on Mon: 07-10-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Chin Up Chin Up Chin Up Chin Up
“This Harness Can't Ride Anything”
[2006]
★★★

A coach can teach Jeremy Bolen to sing, but no one can school Chin Up Chin Up in subtlety. While all I previously wanted from this combo was for Bolen to find a stronger voice, it seems the confidence he's found has spilled out into the band and then some, as "This Harness" is more, more, and more of the same ADHD-indie of their debut. It's brighter and more energetic, certainly, though there's never a chance to warm to any one moment here-- we're left instead trying to catch the coattails of the lookee-what-we-can-do sugar rush.

The first minute: Atmospheric guitar scrapes meet spritely, country-inflected picking meets speeding octaves, Stereolab-brand organ, and whip cracks from drum pads-- you get the picture. There are some strings in there at some point, too. While the eve of a sophomore album is no time to complain about newfound boldness or new tricks, hopefully LP2 will boast some songs that sit still for more than a moment.

MP3: Chin Up Chin Up: This Harness Can't Ride Anything
Posted by Jason Crock in indie rock on Mon: 07-10-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Justin Timberlake Justin Timberlake
“SexyBack”
[2006]
★★
Press releases and fashion mags will undoubtedly trumpet "SexyBack" as a triumph of chisel over pudge, the soundtrack to your daily routine of knocking out sets and knocking down Ultras with the opposite bods, but don't believe it. Fat dudes make jams, and twerps sing like angels. "SexyBack" is pretty much TimbaLake post-whatever-they're-doing, snorting Metabolite and soul-surfing with dingbats. It's a fully greased and lubed pose on the nose of a neon green longboard in the Wave Cove at Raging Waters, bereft of all the previously delirious discomfort of a pencil-necked white boy cloning another pencil-necked sorta-white boy over nü-funk symphonies courtesy of one fat Virginian.

But here we are in the Age of Dr. Fuckeyes Pharrell, the barechested lothario of mealskippers worldwide, force-fed chalky powerbars of low-rep club music, the likes of which isn't even compelling enough to remove our flappy asses from our Aerons. Even from these two superstars, we get a corny rehash not just of artists that Timberlake has already either dated or Mouseketeered with (or both), but of those artists' songs from three years ago. Take your pick: Britney's "I'm a Slave 4 U", JC Chasez and Basement Jaxx's "Plug It In", or anything with Skateboard P singing. It's all in here: the desperately moaning vocals, the bubbling rhythm, the faux-sex-crazed

content. The problem? The only thing about this song that doesn't make me want to lay in bed and eat truffles is a muscular synth line that seems to be suffering from lactic burn after only a few listens. But I'm sure the video will be totally boner country (ladies, too).
Posted by Peter Macia in dance pop on Mon: 07-10-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tokyo Police Club
“Nature of the Experiment”
[2006]
★★★½

Joining the 2006 children's crusade to the indie holy land, these fresh-faced Torontonians tackle chic post-punk revivalism with the similar naiveté of cohorts Be Your Own Pet and Arctic Monkeys. Opening with a Les Savy Fav riff tenderized to Strokes-level infectiousness, the vocals half-heartedly ape the Casablancas-via-intercom bit, though the pathos here comes across as much more dire. Maybe it's just post-pubescent emo residue, but these faux-scientific, faux-postmodern lyrics reveal the band's not too far removed from their salad days, every line here ending wistfully whispered. Thing is, the songwriting's so dense, crisp, and bottled up there's actually little time for gravitas, and it all reflects the best aspects of such youth-- the emotions come impetuously, intricately, and evaporate into nothing in less than 120 seconds.

MP3: Tokyo Police Club: Nature of the Experiment
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Mon: 07-10-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Klee
“Gold”
[2006]
★★★★

For four minutes, German's jagged consonants displace French's susurrous vowels as the language of romance. Klee means "clover," kids, and true to its name this German group has three members (not leaves though): breathy vocalist Suzie Kerstgens, boinky keyboard player Sten Servaes, and cliff-sheer guitar guy Tom Deininger. "Gold", an alpine-cool pelvis-jostler, appeared on the band's 2005 sophomore album *Jelängerjelieber* before being included on this year's forthcoming stateside debut, *Honeysuckle*.

The song draws its future-chic vibe from a head-nod snare beat, a bass line that everybody compares to "Blue Monday" but is totally "You Spin Me Round (Like a Record)", and oncoming guitar claxons, though Kerstgens'

huskier-than-Annie, matter-of-fact vocalwork is as solidly defined as what Goethe called "frozen music"-- i.e., architecture. Fräulein could be translating "Gold Lion", for all I know/care, and I'd still save this last frosty dance. That's not sweat, that's ice melting.

MP3: Klee: Gold
Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Mon: 07-10-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Divine Comedy
"A Lady of a Certain Age"
[2006]
★★★★½

Scott Walker long ago gave up quixotic baroque pop to, uh, tilt still darker windmills. The Divine Comedy's Neil Hannon, meanwhile, has yet to waver in his enthusiasm for big arrangements, bigger conceits, and a brassy baritone that would render the acoustic guitar arpeggios, "Hotel California" (*Hell Freezes Over*!) Latinisms, and moonshot strings utterly ridiculous if the whole presentation weren't somehow sweetly sublime-- as though he actually *trusts* us to savor all this excess? Clearly England's famed dry wit crosses the Irish Sea.

"A Lady of a Certain Age" is a soul-splitting portrait of an English dowager accustomed to the finer things ("You chased the sun around the Côte d'Azur/ Until the light of youth became obscured," begins the chorus) living out her sunset years in dank pub nostalgia. Her late husband leaves the villa to his demimonde, her children are estranged, and really it's all this bony old moneybird's fault. Yet here again Hannon's rich, multifaceted depiction leaves little room for any feeling but compassion. A recurring motif imagines a "nice young man" buying our faded lady a drink and misjudging her age, which she reveals "with a conspiratorial wink," though the age changes each time the scene is played out. "No, you couldn't be," the suitor demurs, but Hannon's operetta is not only worthy of such Walker classics as "Mathilde" and "Duchess", it even lives up to its own not-just-circumstantial pomp.

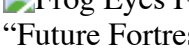
Posted by Marc Hogan in chamber pop on Fri: 07-07-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ludacris
"War With God"
[2006]
★★★½

T.I.'s "I'm Talkin' to You" might be the fiercest rap song of the year, a brutal onslaught of subliminal disses over Just Blaze's air-raid sirens and horn-blats. But nearly half the song is disclaimers, T.I. naming all the specific rappers he isn't talking about, lest any of them get the wrong idea. And somewhere in there, he finds time to reference the mini-beef he had with Ludacris back in 2004: "Had it out with 'Cris, but he still my nigga/ Sat down civilized and talked about it like niggas." Maybe Luda missed that line, since he's coming back now with his own volley of subliminal rips against a target that sure as hell seems to be T.I. (Internet speculators seem to think he's talking about Young Jeezy or Rick Ross, but come on.)

"War With God" rests on a languid, luxurious jazz sample with none of the hectic intensity of Tip's bromide, but Luda comes harder than he has since 2000, enunciating ferociously and sneering audibly: "I paid the price and the cost to be the boss so you could rest your mouth/ I'm universal, Luda never limits hisself to the South." Best part: Luda acknowledges his own lack of criminal experience and announces it as a strength, not a weakness: "I never claimed to be nothing but who the *fuck* I am/ Never sold cocaine in my life but I'm still the *fuck*ing man." Justified or not, he's angry enough to kick himself out of his own diminished-returns stupor, and a reanimated Ludacris could be exactly what Southern rap needs. T.I. (or whoever) has a problem on his hands.

Stream: Ludacris: War With God
Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Fri: 07-07-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Frog Eyes
"Future Fortress"

[2006]
★★★

On the leadoff track to Frog Eyes' forthcoming EP, Carey Mercer sounds surprisingly sedate. Forgoing his usual yelps and howls-- but preserving his skewed phrasing-- the normally manic vocalist offers some of his most melodic singing to date against acoustic strums and rattling hand percussion. Foggy delay and reverbed vocals make "Future Fortress" dense and claustrophobic: Mercer's voice echoes, drifting in and out of focus as snippets of lyrics unexpectedly surface. "Rise up! Rise up! Rise up!" he chants before segueing into a chorus of "la"s. Melanie Campbell adds some spare, but crushing drums just as the song seems poised for a climactic shift. Instead, it ends.

By now, Frog Eyes fans know better than to expect the band's music to be instantly gratifying. And excavating the beauty of Mercer's songs with repeated listens is, in part, what makes them so absorbing. But "Future Fortress" evaporates into nothing as soon as it seems to have materialized. It's frustratingly fragmentary and abrupt, and yet nonetheless a tantalizing glimpse into what Frog Eyes may treat us to next.

Posted by John Motley in indie rock on Fri: 07-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cheyenne Kimball Cheyenne Kimball
“Hanging On”
[2006]
★★
"I've had a bad day," sings 15-year-old Cheyenne Kimball on her second (third?) gen Avril/Kelly/Ashlee knockoff debut single. "And nothing ever seems to go my way." A little background: Cheyenne won NBC's "America's Most Talented Kid" television contest when she was 12; Cheyenne signed to Epic Records when she was 13; Cheyenne is currently the star of her own MTV reality show called..."Cheyenne". Though she's probably had a piece of dust stuck in her eyeball for a few seconds at some point, really, things seem to be going her way.

The chasm between message and actuality matters here because the Cheyenne talking point is authenticity. She's 2006's version of a major label heritage artist who is built for Grammy gold-- she writes her own songs, plays her own guitar, and flicks her long blond locks just so on her own too. So the framework is in place and the song's riffy-lite cheese is ripe, but there's no bite or believability; "Hanging On" makes "Since U Been Gone" sound like a *Kill 'Em All* outtake. With a TV show, a podcast, a video journal, and a blog, Cheyenne is a walking MySpace star, spewing phony angst and narcissism without mercy. "Nothing's gonna stop me anyway," she claims later on. It's about as honest as she gets.

Stream: Cheyenne Kimball: Hanging On
Posted by Ryan Dombal in pop on Fri: 07-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Skew Skew
“Doom Vs. Doom Part 1”
[2006]
★★★
As Limp Bizkit's accountants could tell you, rap/metal soundmelds come off with varying degrees of success. It's a diverse field, though, that includes Run-DMC and Aerosmith breaking walls, Public Enemy and Anthrax bringing noize, the *Judgment Night* soundtrack bringing the crap, and Jay-Z and Linkin Park imbibing Cristal Lite.

New York-based DJ and producer Skew jumps into the timeline, linking MF Doom and assorted doom-related crews via an addictive, conceptually witty mash-up. Most of the charm's courtesy of Doom's hungry-man flow, but Skew pairs the hyper-associational schemes nicely with the super fuzz, especially the opening dose of Sunn 0)))'s escalatory "It Took the Night to Believe" enmeshed with Doom's "Vomit", an a cappella take on "Vomitspit": "It's the beat/ I hear it in my sleep sometimes/ Blare it in your jeep so your peeps can stare at the rhymes."

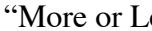
The nocturnal midnight rumbles continue with the masked one's "My Favorite Ladies" and "Air" set to bits of Jesu and Earth, plus other samples I haven't been able to identify. (Actually, first person to name all the swatches-- besides Skew and his pals, of course-- gets a small token of my appreciation/props.) Skew shifts the source material often, ultimately going out with drum loop rattles and dark-lit Broadrick emissions. At seven minutes, you could argue the overlay's long-- then again Skew's got one foot in a genre known for extended tracking, so stitching together MF Doom nuggets to keep the background satiated's thematically tight: Mm...doom.

MP3: Skew: Doom Vs. Doom Part 1
Posted by Brandon Stosuy in mashup on Fri: 07-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Matthew Friedberger Matthew Friedberger
“Up the River”
[2006]
★★★½
The Fiery Furnaces have always embraced epic, vaguely cumbersome compositions, and this Matthew Friedberger sisterless jaunt is appropriately kaleidoscopic. Full of countless tiny songs and a handful of jarring synthesizer burps, Friedberger's solo action is still more measured than meandering, and "Up The River" sounds weirdly like an Aimee Mann song-- with much more skronking, and better surprises.

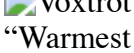
Voice careful and sweet, Friedberger coos quick, self-satisfied witticisms ("If only I could find the secret source of the Missouri River on Opposite Day/ I could cross over to the other side and tell my baby I miss her") over tinkling, gorgeously slight melodies and gentle percussion, half-AM radio, half-psychedelic binge. Things move and change apropos of nothing, this "River" becoming more unpredictable and whimsical as it rolls along, entrancing and dangerous all at once. As Friedberger cheers "Up, up, and away to where my baby went!", it's hard not to imagine lines of grinning children dashing out their front doors, chasing Friedberger and his keyboard down the muddy river banks, skipping and tossing their hands into the air until, in a closing haze of sour keyboard notes, everyone sinks deep into the water, never to be heard from again.

Posted by Amanda Petrusich in indie rock on Thu: 07-06-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Talib Kweli Talib Kweli
“More or Less”
[2006]
★★
It's not that Kweli can't write. Or that he can't rap. Or even that he overindulges both of those abilities. He's just a class-A cornball. "More or Less" takes something of a chance lyrically, where he daps his own label (still corny) over the major label system that spit him out like rotten milk: "More Blacksmithin', Def Jux, less Geffen and the rest cuz the rest suck/ they got my shit all messed up/ more marijuana, less coke, more accountability for politicians/ before we shoutin', let's vote."

Kwa's partner in Reflection Eternal, Hi-Tek, has been collecting paychecks from G-Unit for a while now, leaving the Cincinnati native little time for lighter grooves. This track has a deep backbeat, clearly influenced by his time working with Dr. Dre, and a muddy vocal track beneath the surface, but when Talib gets to his "More serious shit, less kidding" bit, it doesn't matter what he's rhyming over. We're asleep already.

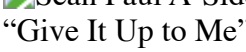
Stream: Talib Kweli: More or Less
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Thu: 07-06-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Voxtrot Voxtrot
“Warmest Part of the Winter”
[2006]
★★★½

On Voxtrot's EPs, you can hear some distance between the musicians and the microphones. But on "Warmest Part of the Winter", the studio closes in around them, compressing the band's careening pop into an intimate coffee-house weeper. A mournful slide melody slices tenderly through slowly chugging rhythm guitar, and the quintet's usual late-song incandescence is understated here as a slight shift in percussive emphasis.

The MOR trappings will irk listeners afflicted with acute adult-contemp-contempt, but that the song manages to be so affecting in spite of them is evidence of Ramesh Srivastava's formidable gift for melodic phrasing. His voice sounds less strained than on the EPs, more effortlessly full, with a soulful hitch and gentle lapping motion. And while Srivastava uses the whole song to develop his ongoing themes-- identity and responsibility, romantic dependency and free will-- he only requires two lines to distill them to their essence: "I had a name/ I let it leave me."

Posted by Brian Howe in indie pop on Thu: 07-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Sean Paul A-Side: Sean Paul
“Give It Up to Me”
B-Side: Sean Paul
“(When You Gonna) Give It Up to Me [ft. Keyshia Cole]”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★
B-Side: ★★★½

More proof Sean Paul is a consummate stoner: on the album cut of his "let's do it" ruse, a little lullaby for a girl he wants to get busy with. When he sings the hook-- "when you gonna give it up to me?"-- he's backed up by what sounds like a burning hot...child's xylophone?! Then, while attempting to persuade the "girl" in question to get into his bed, he rather graphically describes his manly desires. See: Sean Paul popping a boner! Hear: Sean Paul *getting blue balls*. Seriously, my dude? I haven't heard that shit as a come-on since the seventh grade. Furthermore, in the very first line-- "Get outta my head and into di bed girl"-- he's jacking an idea from BILLY OCEAN.

But here's where the magic comes in: Sean Paul sounds prettiest on quiet, simple songs like this (see: "Like Glue"). His vocal tone at the forefront, "Give it Up to Me" is hypnotic despite the jarring erection chit-chat, pied-piper tantalizing the girls to the dancefloor-- which is where he truly wants to take them, no matter what he tells you. The beat, tinny and just subtle enough, takes the edge off Paul's cavemanish wiles, and his voice is both

creamy smooth and permanently pocked. If the herb gives him that lovely crack in his tenor, may he continue to just blaze.

The single version, however, replaces boners with Keyshia Cole, and shifts the mood: Cole, aka Ms. If You Aren't Already Knowing You Better Start, is a force whose airy voice and tragic lyrics prod even the hardest blue-baller into his best behavior. Her presence on the chorus-- parity!-- transforms Paul's juvie leer into a two-party proposition: we get love, respect, and cab fare home in addition to the scented condoms and edible lubricant of the solo original. Let's get it on!

Posted by Julianne Shepherd in dancehall on Thu: 07-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tin Bangs Tin Bangs
"He's So Pretty"
[2006]
★★½

As an EP title and song subject, *Heavy-Handed Darling* suits Toronto foursome Tin Bangs perfectly considering frontman Ben Taylor's a regular heavy-handed dude, though I guess like minds repel. Taylor's got 99 problems and a girl is one of them, leaving him to opine over Interpol riffs that wax emo. He drops lots of goofy lyrics here too, some gauche enough to make me embarrassed for the guy. "Well I am a man, and I can understand what you're doing to me and my life" he declares over a watered-down "Slow Hands" pre-chorus, only to complete the 10th grade English couplet with "You're twisting the knife! You're so pretty!" Don't get me wrong, I love swapping accounts of girl troubles, but these guys should probably save it for likeminded bill-sharers (and confidants?) Editors.

Stream: Tin Bangs: He's So Pretty
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Thu: 07-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Susanna and the Magical Orchestra Susanna and the Magical Orchestra
"Love Will Tear Us Apart"
[2006]
★★★
Downcast Norwegian twosome Susanna and the Magical Orchestra is perhaps best known for an aching cover of Dolly Parton's "Jolene" on their 2004 debut, *List of Lights and Buoys*. That spare interpretation stuck more sturdily than the duo's pretty, but unspectacular originals, wherein Susanna Karolina Wallumrød's pristine vocals time again float atop melancholic keyboard/piano/organ-based backdrops provided by ex-Jaga Jazzist/Shining member Morten Qvenild, who also composes jazzy piano-based stuffs with In the Country. Playing to their strengths, the band's sophomore effort, *Melody Mountain*, promises covers of AC/DC, Sandy Denny, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Kiss, Prince, and Scott Walker, among others. As the list suggests, Wallumrød's reinterpreting songs largely written and sung by dudes the first time around. An emo gender bending concept? Maybe. Here, Ian Curtis's most famous libretto is laid bare. None of the original's nervous, bottled dance remains; instead, it's a languid, nearly a cappella drift.

"Love Will Tear Us Apart"'s been covered countlessly by folks as far ranging as Fall Out Boy (yup), Jah Division, Simple Minds, and José González (also more adept at covers than originals...). Place Susanna's somewhere near (but way above) Nouvelle Vague's take, sans the bossa nova Space Age Bachelor Pad vibe. Maybe Swans' homage? Jarboe's and not Gira's. As on previous remakes, without Ian at the mic, a pained/strained, ultimately posthumous love note becomes something entirely (necessarily) different. On an emotional level, Curtis's "And there's a taste in my mouth, as desperation takes hold/ Just that something so good just can't function no more" chills in ways the others hopefully never will.

MP3: Susanna and the Magical Orchestra: Love Will Tear Us Apart
Posted by Brandon Stosuy in ambient pop on Wed: 07-05-06: 01:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Rapture The Rapture
“Get Myself Into It”
[2006]
★★★★

It's like watching post-punk unfurl all over again, with the PiL and Gang of Four circa-1979 jaggedness of *Echoes* sanded down to early Reagen-era bloat, ripped up, and started again in perfect chronological order. Our first new Luke Jenner-led track finds the band forging past *Remain in Light*, channeling post-punk's later lesser-knowns like Pigbag, 23 Skidoo, and Liquid Liquid.

Matt Safer's typically cyclical bassline reads like jazz for dummies (or punks), while Jenner's guitar sprinkles coked-out reverb in moderation rather than hijacking the song with castrated arena riffs à la Andy Gill. That saxophone from "Open Up Your Heart" comes back for revenge, this time sounding more natural in the foreground than novelty, and I'm left pondering one thing: If and when they progress to late-80s heavy metal, they'll still somehow sound trendier and more ahead of the curve than their dance punk contemporaries.

Stream: The Rapture: Get Myself Into It
Posted by Adam Moerder in dance punk on Wed: 07-05-06: 01:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Janet Jackson Janet Jackson
“Call on Me [ft. Nelly]”
[2006]
★★

1986: Janet Jackson releases her ode to teen abstinence, "Let's Wait Awhile", off the massive *Control*, the video for which stars the Last Dragon attempting to give Janet "the glow."

2001: Destiny's Child perform "Let's Wait Awhile" in tribute to Janet for MTV's *Icon* special.

2002: Erstwhile D-Child Kelly Rowland records an ode to potential infidelity, "Dilemma", with St. Lunatic and Band-Aid enthusiast, Nelly.

2006: Janet Jackson, now essentially married to So So Def founder and godfather to all things A, Jermaine Dupri, teams with aforementioned boo-boo prone Nelly for "Call on Me", an ode to the alone-together relationship fantasy of many a single man and, apparently, Janet no more.

The tie that binds? By-the-book 80s need-love drum machine, kindygarten synth melody, and a strapping skeezerman foil. Other than that amazing chronology, "Call on Me" doesn't offer much, but Janet is Janet and somehow retains her ability to do nothing but whisper and be somewhat interesting. Or is it JD's uncanny ability to change one note from song to song, tap out his 808, and still make it listenable? Whatever it is, this song sounds exactly like it looks on paper.

Stream: Janet Jackson: Call on Me [ft. Nelly]
Posted by Peter Macia in r&b on Wed: 07-05-06: 11:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

DJ Shadow DJ Shadow
“Enuff [ft. Q-Tip and Lateef the Truth Speaker]”
[2006]
★★★½

Here's where it gets real weird: "Enuff" is the most disarmingly pop-minded leak from *The Outsider* so far, free of Josh Davis' more baroque dusty-crate samples. Q-Tip comes back to trade lines with Lateef the Truth Speaker, who dominates here and instructs everyone to "get up on the dance floor/ for a chance for/ an encounter that's romantic..." Apparently being a conscious rapper means using some meandering-ass syntax, but whatever-- these guys are here for texture and not much else, content to ride on and hammer in Shadow's salsa-with-bump beat.

Still, another producer would've had his hands slapped away from the drum machine, while "Enuff" crackles like Rice Krispies (if you saw him on the *Private Press* tour, think Shadow's video-sampling bit with a Neptunes-style compressed guitar line and you'd be pretty close). Another producer wouldn't have let the guitar riff stand up front and carry on as long as Shadow does, allowed to ascend and descend like it's almost live. And another producer wouldn't have added that sci-fi bass wobble to the second eight of the chorus, but by then you're peeling the onion back pretty far. "Enuff" contains only the barest hints that the DJ calls himself Shadow, noticed solely by the trainspotters who probably aren't dancing to it.

Stream: DJ Shadow: Enuff [ft. Q-Tip and Lateef the Truth Speaker]
Posted by Jason Crock in hip hop on Wed: 07-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Plot to Blow Up the Eiffel Tower
"Inri (Nick Zinner Remix)"
[2006]
★★★

The title of the Plot's new single comes from the Latin inscription that was reportedly placed over Christ's head on the cross and translates as "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The significance of this reference is, obviously, crucial to the song and its dark mood, which Nick Zinner expands in this remix, improving on the original only slightly.

Zinner borrows the most outstanding elements from the Plot's version-- the scratchy guitar licks like lashes across the skin, the abrasive vocals delivering Revelations-inspired lyrics-- bolstering them with a tripping percussion rhythm and an unsettling horn line, while highlighting the propulsive bassline. This more complex interplay of instruments has an almost funky momentum, recalling James Brown as much as the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, and creating a thundering undercurrent atop which Brandon Welchez's deeply disaffected lyrics (which describe a "disgusting king" that could be Bush or any politician who misuses religion as a platform) sound slightly out of place. But that only makes his ideas-- and the band-- more assaulting and unsettling.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie rock on Wed: 07-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Thursday
"The Other Side of the Crash/Over and Out (of Control)"
[2006]
★★★½
Saw these guys open for Sonic Youth and Iggy Pop two or three summers ago in New York as part of what was probably the most schizophrenic concert ever. *War All the Time* had just come out, and everyone in the upper deck sat watching these dudes in black turtlenecks, 400 yards away, talk up the political side of their canned whine-core, singer Geoff Rickley seemingly complaining that Bush hadn't just sent him off to war, but stolen his girlfriend, too. Later, Iggy coiled a 30 foot mic cable around his neck, using only his neck.

The Dave Fridmann-produced "The Other Side of the Crash" spares us the soapbox, sticking to megaphone vocals, loud (but not hard) guitars, and car crashes, Thursday's favorite topic. The band's sound has expanded along with its ability to pay for studios with bigger consoles. Really the only difference here is better reverb and a breakdown that plays innie to *Full Collapse*'s outie: burning fuselage sustain and pickup play instead of metal riff, whooshing cymbal rolls instead of half-time beat, no vocals instead of vocals. (I swear I hear "Karen Revisited" for a split second.) Emo's most workmanlike band succeed because these experimental urges are present but never overindulged.
Posted by Sam Ubl in emo on Wed: 07-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Strokes
"Mercy Mercy Me [ft. Eddie Vedder and Josh Homme]"
[2006]
★

Way back in 2003, I had this theory about the Strokes. Under the stipulation that *Room On Fire*'s sublime ballad "Under Control" is their best song, I thought these five fellows from New York City should release a Motown covers album. Really. The aching confessional is, after all, a canny rewrite of the Miracles' "The Tracks of My Tears"; it's a rip-off of the highest order, with the group perfectly projecting their drunken unravel onto a Detroit classic. Why not pull the same trick on "My Girl", "This Old Heart of Mine (Is Weak From You)", and "Stubborn Kind of Fellow"?

Of course, it's only after Julian started using a real microphone and Nick started thinking cheese-metal guitar solos were the shit that they go the Motown route, covering Marvin Gaye's inconvenient truth eco-anthem (not exactly Holland-Dozier-Holland, sure, but it's close). And then they invite new broheim Eddie Vedder to add craggy grunge vocals and Josh Homme to exchange stuttering robot drum jerk offs with Fab. Inexcusable. Julian sounds like he means it, but everyone else seems to be playing in their own private universe-- one that is totally oblivious to the sorrowful elegance of Gaye's original plea.

Just a B-side lark? Fuck that. The Strokes should be embarrassed-- they officially lost whatever was left of their ragged spark while slumming through this unimpeachable classic.

Posted by Ryan Dombal in alternative rock on Fri: 06-30-06: 01:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Qualo Qualo
“Crack”
[2006]
★★★½

The MCs comprising Chicago quartet Qualo, recently signed to Universal, elevate their minds without sacrificing their God-given street smarts, so their biting "Crack"-- a funny parody of crack-rappers that seeks not to moralize but to mock-- is not only credible, but rings true, too. The intro makes it plain: "You niggas take yourself way too serious, so we laughing at the whole muhfuckin' game." This kind of rapper-to-rapper sarcasm hasn't been done so effectively since Black Sheep sent up AK-wielding Gs (aka N.W.A) in 1991's "U Mean I'm Not".

Over the skulking beat to Mobb Deep's "Put 'Em in Their Place", Optimyst, Preast, Shala Esquire, and Chicago Shawn exact perfect impressions of Jim Jones' throaty brogue and 50 Cent's breezy drawl, stealthy comedic ammo for absurdist one-liners like "Yo, my balls on crack! Yo' mama album on crack!" and "My Infini on crack, shit my city on crack. And the Range out back? Yeah, nigga, on crack." No doubt they question the truth in claims from 24-hour rapper/hustlers, but more than indicting these characters, "Crack" acts as chin-check for anyone who glamorizes the dealer's grind, like the streets are a pretty place to be. Clearly, anyone who thinks so is smoking their own product.

MP3: Qualo: Crack

Posted by Julianne Shepherd in hip hop on Fri: 06-30-06: 11:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Test Icicles Test Icicles
“Circle. Square. Triangle (Spank Rock Mix)”
[2006]
★★

At this point remixing Test Icicles is like shooting up an enfeebled heroin addict. This is perhaps exactly why party mooks Spank Rock volunteered for the job. Spank implore listeners to "stop thinking so hard", while the UK's beloved/bemoaned Icicles never had that problem. So naturally this track aims to kill what few brain cells the defunct punks had left, stripping their debut/swan song's best tune of its centerpiece riff.

I loved "Circle. Square. Triangle" because it slipped up, suggesting there was maybe a lick of sincerity after all beneath the band's ludicrous, Halloween-fangs-wearing, fake-blood-capsule-chewing facade. Spank Rock correct that. Their bass drum hits sound less like percussion and more like someone gulping down water. They keep the

original's shrill guitar upbeats, but switch out all the other melodic parts for insectile synth buzz and a glassy arpeggio. And the vocals have been distorted: Now not only does it sound like the Icicles cut their tongues off, but they're underwater, too.

Posted by Sam Ubl in indie rock on Fri: 06-30-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lil Scrappy
"Gangsta Gangsta"
[2006]
★★½

Lil Scrappy's "No Problem" may be the best thing Lil Jon has ever done. There's no pretense, no squiggles, no r&b hook, no accessible synths, no product tie-ins. The military-style "whooot" on the chorus is probably the catchiest thing there. It's the embodiment of youthful fear and anger over tumbling keyboards, the still-teenaged Scrappy proving himself his first time out.

"Gangsta Gangsta" picks up right where "No Problem" left off, opening with Jon's unrelenting Andrew Lloyd Webber-circa *Phantom* piano rolls and Scrap's voice stacked on top of some semi-restrained 808s. Problem is, this appears to be the end all, be all, and seen all of Scrappy's repertoire. Recalling Eazy-E's proto-block shit in tone and language, the only twist he offers is a few G-Unit shout-outs (he's signed a split deal with 50 Cent and Jon's BME) and better hair (no jheri curl). Saying little aside from mantra shit ("I keep my muthafuckin' hand on my fuckin' gat."), Scrappy may need to come with more of himself if he wants to step beyond rim-rockers like this. But if club-smacking's the goal, this is as good a place to swat a palm as any.

Stream: Lil Scrappy: Gangsta Gangsta
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Fri: 06-30-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Help She Can't Swim
"Midnight Garden"
[2006]
★★★★

Frenzied yelps of "THIRTEEN!" punctuating "Midnight Garden" like aural scare quotes notwithstanding, God knows what Help She Can't Swim's (non-swimming?) frontwoman screeches during the song's fleeting two-and-a-half-or-so minutes. It doesn't matter-- this is music for your guts! Also doesn't matter that Help She Can't Swim's psycho-killer, sharp-around-the-edges sound resembles Blood Brothers, fellow Brits Test Icicles (RIP), or maybe Love Is All.

So you probably couldn't sing along to this shit (you could count along; you could also yell "thirteen!"), but you could definitely act out some kind of mini-play or murder-mystery in three or four parts and have it perfectly backdropped by alternating guitar downstrokes/screaming and mellowed-out, fluttery-but-still-creepy vocals. You could also probably just dance (everybody do the Scare Quote!-- it's exactly what it sounds like) or eat very rare red meat or something.

Stream: Help She Can't Swim: Midnight Garden
Posted by Rachel Khong in indie rock on Fri: 06-30-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

J Dilla
"Love [ft. Pharoahe Monch]"
[2006]
★★★

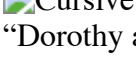
Promos sent out for Dilla's posthumous album *The Shining* feature sound clips from Stanley Kubrick's film of the same name to discourage leaks and file-sharing. On "Love", Jack Nicholson's famed "You're breaking my

concentration" resounds. It's an ironic drop for myriad reasons, but most especially because Dilla was all about frozen consistency. He had the astounding ability to be dependable, if occasionally boring.

The only truly remarkable thing about "Love" is the ever-elusive Pharoahe Monch's presence. But it's convivial-- hell, practically gushing-- in its construction. Round horns and a lilting soul loop that rings out "We must be in love!" surround Monch's nu-bohemian predilections: "One life, one love, one fight, one struggle." Such purple pronouncements aren't without their own equally amusing counterparts: "Impeach the president and his government/ I voted for Gaaaw-d!" But this isn't precise lyricism that lines up with its backdrop. So we're left with workmanlike, albeit affectionate, production-- just as Dilla often was throughout most of his career.

MP3: J Dilla: Love [ft. Pharoahe Monch]
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Thu: 06-29-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Al DeLoner Al DeLoner
“Wake Me Up [ft. Nikki Sudden]”
[2006]
★★★½
Nikki Sudden still has a few posthumous appearances to go before he can compete with Tupac, but it's nice to hear his voice again, especially in such fine form. Al DeLoner, former guitarist for Norway's long-running folk-rock trio Midnight Choir, creates a landscape of dejection with leaden piano chords and sparsely weeping slide guitar, bringing in a little bit of sad accordion toward the end. The production is so intimate that you can hear a chair squeaking at the beginning of the song, and Sudden sounds like he's sitting right next to you, especially when the instruments drop away at the end, leaving just his raw utterance: "you don't want to sleep alone for the rest of your life, and sure as hell neither do I." It feels a little weird hearing someone whose life is over say that, but "Wake Me Up" is a powerful final encore for Sudden, and a creeping portrait of the buoy of love turning into the stone of longing.
Posted by Joe Tangari in doom pop on Thu: 06-29-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Cursive Cursive
“Dorothy at Forty”
[2006]
★★★½

Doge of Emo-ha Tim Kasher has spent his career wondering What It All Means, which makes him an optimist in my book. So pardon "Dorothy at Forty" and its emo-does-*Revolutionary Road* cynicism-- suburban ennui is the young idealist's food. The song concerns-- you guessed it-- a deluded American dreamer with a taste for pie, name of Dorothy. Dorothy feels symptoms of that annoying wake-up-to-reality bug to which residents of Anytown, USA seem especially susceptible.

Kasher punctuates his protagonist's distress with sax skronk, rollercoastering synth waves, and a skittishly charging guitar line, which conspire together to give the song its caged-up desperation. The rhythm shucks and jukes to the contours of Kasher's choppy cadence: "Dream cars, dream houses/ Dream jobs, dream spouses/ Dreams of tornadoes/ Cities of emerald." Cursive helped cultivate one of the most utopian underground music communities of the last decade. Ironic, then, that they're now set on dismantling utopia.

Posted by Sam Ubl in indie rock on Thu: 06-29-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Hector Bambino "El Father" Hector Bambino "El Father"
“Here We Go Yo [ft. Jay-Z]”
[2006]
★

Bambino's been around the block, gaining tons of fame as one half of the duo Hector and Tito, and now he's signed with Jay-Z's Roc La Familia imprint. Hov blesses the track at its outset. And by "blesses," I mean he talk-raps over the song and creepily culture-humps in the process. The track itself is a lurching bit of reggaeton that

straightens out into a lockstep groove with the arrival of brawny horns. It's also pretty annoying. "Here we go yo" is hardly a clever hook, but Bambino's flow is a sturdy monotone distinct enough to separate him from The Prez' chirping (When was the last time a Jay-Z feature was this ineffectual?). Bambino's problem: his gravel-gargling catcall. It's a wonder he's risen so hard and fast as a Puerto Rican superstar-- his voice is sort of squirm-inducing. As far as label entrances go, Roc La Familia is off to a rocky start.

Stream: Hector Bambino : Here We Go Yo [ft. Jay-Z]
Posted by Sean Fennessey in reggaeton on Thu: 06-29-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Chris Thile
"Dead Leaves and the Dirty Ground"
[2006]
★★½

For starters, this is certainly a lot better than Joss Stone's "Fell in Love with a Boy", but what isn't? Nickel Creek's Chris Thile refashions the White Stripes' rocker as a front-porch jam with a surprisingly smooth bluegrass melody and some decent mandolin picking toward the end. He musses up his vocals to give the tune a looser groove, but despite the near-complete overhaul, it sounds a little too squeaky clean, especially compared to the rough edges of the original. His allegiance to a semipopular band like the Stripes (he's gone so far as to proclaim their original "one of the best bluegrass songs of all time") may come off like a calculated cred-grab, but Thile's affection for his source material is evident, which makes his "Dead Leaves" a creditable attempt that simply falls flat.

Stream: Chris Thile: Dead Leaves and the Dirty Ground
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in bluegrass on Thu: 06-29-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lady Sovereign
"Gatheration"
[2006]
★★

A year ago, Lady Sovereign was a glorious little novelty, a tiny rapper chick with a mall-punk sneer and a perfect sense of her own ridiculousness. She was tough and funny and fascinating, and everything got better when we figured out that she could actually rap. But quasi-celebrity does funny things to people, especially when Jay-Z inexplicably signs said people to Def Jam and immediately makes these people bigger priorities than Joe Budden or Redman.

On the surface, "Gatheration" doesn't sound all that different from "Ch-Ching" or "Random"; it's got the same hard-candy synth-plinks and goofy sound-effects. But Sov isn't rapping like a baby hyena on Sparks anymore; she's trying to ride the beat the way real rappers do, and it's not a good look. The playfulness has gone out of her voice, and all we get now is stony, ice-grill, toughguy nonsense: "You see this life? Well, you're never gonna taste it/ I don't associate with wasters." And the beat is straight-up club-cheese, the sort of thing the Trackmasters might've shit out in 1999. Jay-Z is a smart man, but I have no idea how he intends to sell a mess like this. Sov was a lot more promising when she *did* associate with wasters.

MP3: Lady Sovereign: Gatheration
Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Wed: 06-28-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Nas
"Where Y'all At"
[2006]
★★★★

It looks ugly and bitter written out plain like that: *Hip Hop Is Dead*. Without context, the title of Nas' first solo disc for Def Jam comes off like a tragically myopic non-starter, accentuating an aging MC's deepening crow's

feet. But, as this offering attests, Nasir's idea of death may emphasize an implicit resurrection as he flouts the big nothing and its drowsy cousin with flinty acuteness. If anything, the crow's feet are from years of relentless, searching squints.

Producer Salaam Remi flips his masterful "Made You Look" beat inside out, cutting up the hook and exposing its quiet core with this woozy, ninth level sliver. Meanwhile, Nas continues his journey as mind-bending Queensbridge ghost, doing a "slow dance with the devil" on his way to an overlooking limbo somewhere between cracked potholes and a more luxurious perch. Moral: Still is not ill. Yet Nas is still ill.

They say it all becomes clear near the end.

MP3: Nas: Where Y'all At
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Wed: 06-28-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

White Whale White Whale
“The Admiral”
[2006]
★★½

Hailing from William S. Burroughs' Lawrence, Kansas, White Whale is a seasoned quintet with a penchant for oceanic mini-epics. The crew here includes ex-Get Up Kids bassist Rob Pope (what?), three members of Thee Higher Burning Fire, and-- most importantly for aging indie fans-- ex-Butterglory dude Matt Suggs, vocalizing.

No, this isn't a cover of the Shellac song of the same name, but the second-person storytelling (bar brawl? law breaking? murder?) does oddly evoke Butterglory's 1994 tune, "The Skills of the Star Pilot". Instead of that olden track's bespeckled, lo-fi high fives, however, we have nautical bar-band baroque with Arcade Fire collective "oh"s, martial drums, walk-the-plank ivories, and a huge tidal-wave finale. Name-droppers beware: Beyond the heavenward sing-along, comparisons to Win's posse are ill-founded. Suggs' more mannered lyrics lack the unmediated, zine-boy emo of Butler's snow tunnels, and even when this rocks (check those late-quarter muscular shouts), there's something eerily AOR about its execution.

MP3: White Whale: The Admiral
Posted by Brandon Stosuy in indie rock on Wed: 06-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Busta Rhymes Busta Rhymes
“New York Shit (Marley Marl Remix) [ft. KRS-One]”
[2006]
★★★★

Submitting to the affirmative. That's the problem with this New York shit. Head-nodding and "If you from New York stand up right now!" and clapping hands are all symptomatic of the blindly confirmatory nature of this thing. "Yes" to this bloated, obsequious call to arms-- that's what Busta, Swizz, and DJ Scratch (who jacked Diamond D for the original) seem to be saying. The remix, though, sounds less forced, with irrefutable old dogs Marley and Kris Parker at work. Suddenly, over a familiar "wah" loop and those crisp drums, Swizz's "razor in my mouth on my New York shit" pseudo-territoriality doesn't sound so wack.

Busta has been in a rut for some time, simultaneously popping brow blood vessels while remaining wholly uninteresting ("I rep the Giants and Jets, New York Knicks"-- any real New Yorker knows that people who root for both the Giants and Jets are busters). But the thrust and immediacy happens to suit the precept (respect your own area code) more than Diamond's "I Went For Mine". To close, KRS smashes the track for the first time in nearly a decade, bellowing that pompous but earned revolutionary chatter: "Turnin' over cop cars, that's that New York shit." That crick in your neck is called nodding, by the way.

Stream: Busta Rhymes: New York Shit (Marley Marl Remix) [ft. KRS-One]
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Wed: 06-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Wild Colonials Wild Colonials
“Vicious Circle”
[2006]
★★

After several years away, the Wild Colonials haven't lost their penchant for pent-up tension, which suits Angela McCluskey's voice so damn well. She hasn't lost any of her forcefulness either, while guitarist Shark carries the melody nicely into a good, old-fashioned solo, which almost makes up for the dated programmed beats that anchor the track.

Too bad the songwriting isn't up to the music: "I know how Dorothy Parker felt with someone in her way" is a little much, making the title both too literal and too literary. And the chorus sounds like a lead-in to a bigger, more dramatic, more cathartic chorus that never comes along-- leaving this circle woefully incomplete.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in folk rock on Wed: 06-28-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Comets on Fire Comets on Fire
“Lucifer's Memory”
[2006]
★★★
Unlike most Comets tracks, this blues ballad elects not to follow the white rabbit and take the red pill, but rather cozies up on the basement's beer-stained shag carpet for some (relatively) sober introspection and maybe a round of Space Invaders. In other words, it's a swaggering psych-blues confessional in the vein of Led Zeppelin's "Since I've Been Loving You" that shows off some slick phalanges action. Probably not as easy to swallow for the indie pop lightweights who improbably rallied behind *Blue Cathedral*, especially considering how Ethan Miller's controlled howl uncomfortably approaches Black Crowes levels of blues schmaltz. As one of indie's greatest parvenue stories though, they can still get away with the hazy jam-band aesthetics while managing to sound fresh. Prog-haters, there's your caveat emptor.
Posted by Adam Moerder in psych rock on Tue: 06-27-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Baby Cham Baby Cham
“Ghetto Story (Remix) [ft. Akon]”
[2006]
★★★★★

The original version of "Ghetto Story" is a dystopian monsterpiece, a furious blast of disenfranchised rage and righteous self-assertion, powerful enough to shake Jamaican authorities into banning it from airwaves. Over skeletal drum-triggers and amorphous clouds of John Carpenter synth, Cham roars a tragically triumphant coming-up narrative. "I remember those days when hell was my home/ And me and mama bed was a big piece of foam," he starts out, before weaving in the names of ancient Jamaican kingpins and dead best friends and armed robberies, then building up to a wordless chant of distilled bravura on the chorus: "Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah!" It's total goosebump shit.

The remix wisely leaves all that intact, finding room for Akon to tell his own story (African immigration to car-thievery to prison) in the spaces between the verses. The effect is a dizzy, cinematic cross-cutting; Akon and Cham's stories never intersect, but both feel like they're parts of a dangerous whole. Each vocalist keeps his details masterfully concrete, telling us the names of the people who died and the streets where they died. Even better, Akon's eerily silky croon rubs up against Cham's desperate hyena yowl, giving two ugly tales the beauty they deserve. Someone needs to sit down with these two and have a long conversation about film rights.

Posted by Tom Breihan in dancehall on Tue: 06-27-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A.C. Newman A.C. Newman
“TransCanada [ft. Kathryn Calder]”
[2006]

★★★

Kathryn Calder might have the hardest job in indie rock. As a New Pornographer and A.C. Newman collaborator, she has to replace Neko Case on tour and now in the studio-- a chore for anyone, but especially someone whose stage presence is a little untested (though she's gaining experience as the vocalist/keyboardist for Immaculate Machine) and carries a vague whiff of nepotism (he's Uncle Carl to her). Any singer in this position would likely incur fans' automatic disappointment, but Calder's neither a slacker nor a shrinking violet. She takes lead vocals on this opening track-- penned for a 2005 documentary and recently made available via iTunes-- which has all the predictable elements of a Newman tune: bouncy keyboards, kippering guitar, and a verse melody that's catchier than the chorus. In other words, no real surprises here.

But bless her heart, Calder sings the song like it's Newman's "On the Table"-- or at least the Pornos' "From Blown Speakers". Sure, her phrasing can be a little stiff-- she enunciates every consonant perfectly, which seems to keep her constantly behind the beat-- but damned if she doesn't nail the "oooh-oooh-ooh-oooh"s on the chorus. And as we all know, the "oooh-oooh-ooh-oooh"s are the most important part of any Newman composition.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Tue: 06-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Gossip
“Are U That Somebody”
[2006]
★½

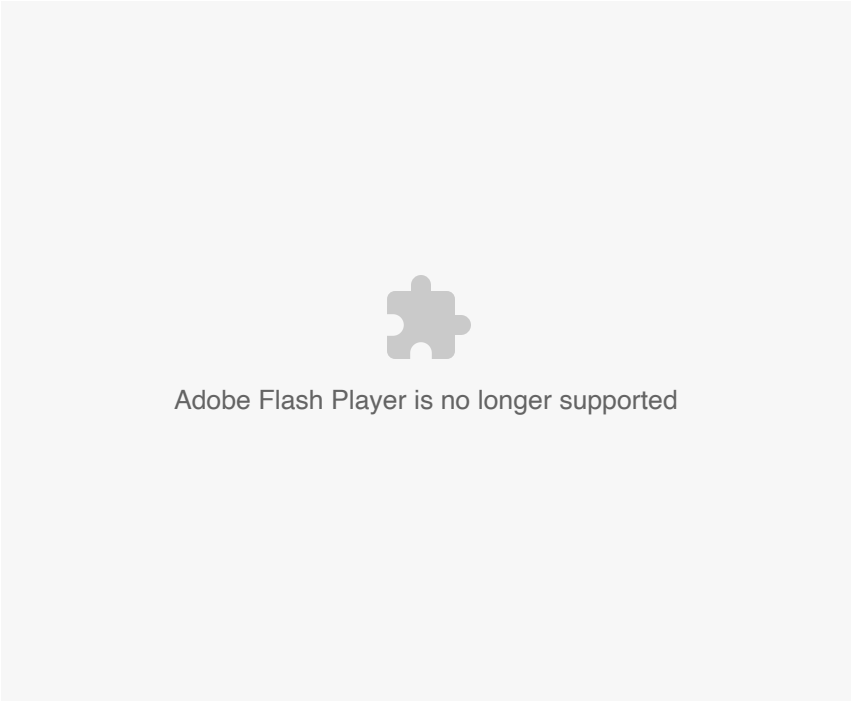
Counting thick bass grooves, danceable beats, and Beth Ditto's wail among its chief weapons, the Gossip is hardly known for subtlety-- so the choice to cover this slow and sultry Aaliyah jam is more than a little curious. The trio preserves the song's less-is-more mechanics, limiting the music to lurching bass, dub-inflected guitar accents, and sparse drums. Ditto even sticks to the script, whispering Timbaland's famed "Dirty South/ Can you really feel it?/ East Coast, West Coast" before the bass drops.

While Ditto and co. pare down their penchant for sonic freakouts for the sake of getting freaky, what this cover ultimately reveals is just how dependent the original was on slicker-than-slick production. Without those cooing babies or Timbaland chiming in with "baby girl," we're left with something that doesn't sound soulfully spare, but just plain skimpy.

Stream: The Gossip: Are U That Somebody

Posted by John Motley in indie rock on Tue: 06-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Mary J. Blige
“Enough Cryin' [ft. Brook-Lyn]”
[2006]
★★



Yeah, enough's enough. If you've heard one empowering Mary J. Blige independent woman track, then you'll probably want to hear more, but you don't want this one. Rodney Jerkins sleepwalks to the bank, waking up long enough to toss in some overly dramatic strings and mistake the rewind button for the snooze bar. Meanwhile, Ms. Blige takes herself to task for falling for some no-good schmoe, while her "wild and crazy" alter ego Brook-Lyn takes her to task for not getting more stuff from the guy. Supposedly, Brook is around to voice all the off-the-wall smack that Mary's too prim and proper to say out loud. If the best Bizarro Blige can come up with is a shopping list from Nordstrom, though, then perhaps the Queen of Hip Hop Soul should focus more on the latter half of her epithet.

Posted by David Raposa in r&b / hip hop on Tue: 06-27-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Belle and Sebastian Belle and Sebastian
“Baby Jane (Live at Sirius)”
[2006]
★★½

Stuart Murdoch has never made any secret of his fondness for Rod Stewart. In fact, the Belle and Sebastian frontman was once reportedly seen prancing in leopard-print trousers. Notwithstanding that nod to anti-fashion, most Murdoch obsessives probably pegged him as more of a pre-disco, Faces-era Rod rooter. Not so: On the flip of their new single, "White Collar Boy", Belle and Sebastian trot straight-faced through "Baby Jane", a synth-spritzed, Huey Lewis & the News-y single from Stewpot's 1983 album *Body Wishes*.

Murdoch and co. strip "Baby Jane" down to a 1960s-tinged soul lament, jettisoning the synths for Stax horns and injecting a touch of funk into the straightlaced guitar and bass lines. Murdoch still can't resist a bit of a Stewart impression, but rather than affect full-out huskiness, his voice sounds mostly frail and multi-hued, like weathered papyrus, and he imbues the wan melody with a mix of heartbreak and stoicism that would have suited *The Life Pursuit*'s choirgirl protagonist. "When I fall in love again, I know/ It's gonna last forever", Murdoch repeats hoarsely. In a world that already has Shai's "If I Ever Fall in Love", those words may not sound like much, but for a moment the arrangement is enough to grant Stewart's myriad musical sins at least a temporary indulgence.

Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Mon: 06-26-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

BHI
“Do It, Do It (Poole Palace) [ft. K-Rab and Lil Jon]”
[2006]

★★½

It's continuously ridiculous to hear old heads whine and lament the sacrifice of their sacred overlord, hip hop, at the altar of snap music. Like there was never a great song about dancing and girls' asses recorded in the world before D4L dropped from the sky, a fully-formed critical strawman. What Born Husslers Inc. do is pay homage to a nascent form, christening their limp-whipping dance the "Poole Palace", after a hollowed-out little club that happens to be the same place that snap music was born and continues to thrive in Decatur, GA. Now it's a dance and a song, built on a winnowy sliver of keyboard chimes, tumbling bounce drums, and little else. The words, as they tend to be in these songs, are alternately uninviting ("I beat that mouth up-- ooh, I think she like that") and incisive ("You too cool to dance?"), but their hook is enormous and hilarious-- a coy piece of Simon Says. "Bend yo knees, rock yo hips, do the Poole Palace." Now if only we could get this into the "Electric Slide"-"Macarena"-"Chicken Dance" rotation at weddings.

Video: BHI: Do It, Do It (Poole Palace) [ft. K-Rab and Lil Jon]
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Mon: 06-26-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jazze Pha & Cee-Lo Green Jazze Pha & Cee-Lo Green
“Rapper's Delight [ft. Twista]”
[2006]
★★★

I warned you last time; now I'm eating the humble pie, 'cause I actually kinda like Jazze's sinusoids here-- and "So What" now sits comfortably near the summit of Mt. Top 40. The wiggly wave works better in this context, paired with sunshiney plastic horn swells and a horny-ass bassline. Cee can't seem to do anything that isn't shot through with concept these days-- *Happy Hour* is his and Jazze's ode to oversweetened spirits in plastic cups and, appropriately, this song takes on a toxic green hue from their spun-sugar vocals. I guess that makes Twista the spike in the punch, even if his anchor verse-- a riff on the original "Rapper's Delight"-- only induces drowsiness. At least we now know Cee-Lo's housemates are okay with walking in on their paterfamilias sucking face on the living room couch (word is he's got an "Osbournes"-style reality show in the works): "I mean, May, Tae, Hank, Zach, Fay...everybody 'OK' you/ And it's your reality, I'll get MTV to pay you." Roll cameras.
Stream: Jazze Pha & Cee-Lo Green: Rapper's Delight [ft. Twista]
Posted by Sam Ubl in hip hop on Mon: 06-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

David Bazan David Bazan
“Backwoods Nation”
[2006]
★★½
Writing about faith or the emotional terrain of personal relationships is a tightrope walk: one misstep and you're plummeting into trite, cloying territory. David Bazan's work with the now defunct Pedro the Lion bore a characteristically light touch, treating such delicate topics with compassion and fallibility-- so when his songs occasionally took to the soapbox, it was easy to forgive them.

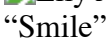
But "Backwoods Nation"-- a re-recorded Pedro track originally released on a 2002 Jade Tree comp-- abandons this subtlety as Bazan unleashes a buckshot spray of vitriol at some can't-miss targets. In a kind of call to disarmament, he goads racist rednecks, "doctors of spin and the smokescreen," and date-rapist frat boys. While the original was a spare and dazed acoustically driven number, this new version seethes with tense frustration. A blunt stop-start rhythm, a riff-heavy outro, and a strained vocal delivery more capably articulate Bazan's anger. Musically, it's a big improvement, but his message remains problematic: the uncomplicated critique seems to rely on the same reductive logic as the hicks, jocks, and Fox Newsies he derides. And given his audience, "Backwoods Nation" isn't going to yield any converts; instead, Bazan's just preaching to the choir.
MP3: David Bazan: Backwoods Nation
Posted by John Motley in indie rock on Mon: 06-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

photo by Laura Edith Guy Bat for Lashes
“The Wizard”
[2006]
★★★

Brighton-based group Bat For Lashes is the spooky brainchild of youthful singer-songwriter Natasha Khan, and was recently chosen by guest curator Devendra Banhart to perform at this past spring's ATP Festival alongside such vets as Vashti Bunyan and Bert Jansch. That appearance might lead one to prematurely jump to certain freak-folk conclusions, especially when coupled with the group's supernatural, Tolkien Society-approved song titles like "The Wizard". Yet there's nothing particularly folk-like about Bat for Lashes' debut single, a curious little gothic miniature that is rife with distant thunderclaps and swirling fogbank electronics. Khan's enchanted voice and general theatrical presence have earned her some natural comparisons to a young Kate Bush, a resemblence that is perhaps refracted in this instance by the minor-key atmospherics of Portishead or Andrea Parker.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but this song's subject appears to be less a wizard and more like...a vampire? "Trembling midnight lands/ I traveled with the wizard," sings Khan with glassy-eyed detachment, "Drink his blood and he's our leader." (We can only hope she isn't talking about Banhart.) On the choruses, Khan's multi-tracked vocals swoop in to form a disembodied coven/chorale above the music's flickering shadows, her deceptively sweet melodies distracting you from the ominous footsteps advancing across the darkened woodlands.

MP3: Bat for Lashes: The Wizard
Posted by Matthew Murphy in indie on Mon: 06-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink


Lily Allen Lily Allen
“Smile”
[2006]
★★★★

Okay, so you've had that Paris Hilton song on your iPod long enough, yeah? We can all hear it through your earbuds, holmes, and it makes your toe-tapping and tight-lipped silent sing-along that much more shameful, especially considering you're just a MySpace click away from being credible. Same fortunate bloodlines, same affinity for bouncy nü-skank (not that kind of skank), different accent. This time British instead of Beverly Hills, but that's the least of which makes Lily the better choice.

Paris is an idiot. Common knowledge. Lily is sharp-witted, filthy-mouthed, and, as famed 52-year-old critic Frank Kogan notes on *his* MySpace page, "She just gets herself so naturally into her words"-- where Paris gets herself so naturally out of her clothes. And the music is better, too. A summer jam of the sweetest variety, its ingredients-- plinky piano, warm organ rolls, windchimes-- swirl in a big-ass coconut of rocksteady, while Lily coos a little *schadenfreude* at the expense of her ex. Where Paris might seek revenge by screwing her ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend's ex-boyfriend, Lily relies on her pals for the recuperative strength necessary to turn down her old flame's desperate advances, and if that isn't a refreshing enough bit of feminism for your subway ride, maybe you should throw yourself on the tracks.

Stream: Lily Allen: Smile
Posted by Peter Macia in pop on Fri: 06-23-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Casey Dienel
"Better in Manhattan (Daytrotter Session)"
[2006]
★★★★

Dienel weaves a tale of a stripper named Sugar in this quasi-paean to Manhattan, where you have to wear lipstick for tips and costumes for tricks. Old men bombard you with catcalls, relationships become strained, plants only grow on fire escapes, "the buildings are tall, and the sky is something you search for"-- or "reach for," as she sings in one of the song's cleverest turns of phrase. But the big-city trials make Dienel's protagonist savor her small triumphs: "It's not easy 'cause it never is/ that's why everything tastes so good."

As she proved on her debut earlier this year, Dienel can be wittily charming and keenly observant, and her heart-on-sleeve delivery amplifies the humor and verisimilitude in "Better in Manhattan". The local details feel just right, from stepping outside for a smoke (after the smoking ban), to the Archies reference in the hook (which more than compensates for the Regina Spektor outro). All these vignettes add up to a surprisingly intricate and intimate ode to a city-- and, moreover, a woman's statement of determined self-reliance even in a cold and cruel place.

MP3: Casey Dienel: Better in Manhattan (Daytrotter Session)
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Fri: 06-23-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Go! Team
"Bull in the Heather"
[2006]
★★
I'd love to see the dartboard the Go! Team chucked at before deciding on this utterly random and confusing cover. Perhaps the Team's aiming to cultivate a more aesthete-over-athlete image by covering a song from one of Sonic Youth's most disregarded albums, though this combined with the Kevin Shields remix gives the squad an 0-2 record when dabbling with indie monoliths. Ousting Kim Gordon's bohemian gasps with cheerleader cadences feels like high school Darwinism at its worst. On the flip side, they treat the instrumentation like a sacred cow, barely touching it save for the added handclaps and faux-Prodigy beats. It could be worse: they could've crammed another "Tighten Up" sample in there or really accentuated those *Bring It On* claps, but ultimately the Team's signature 1970s sheen yields too much to its noise rock sample.

Stream: The Go! Team: Bull in the Heather
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie pop on Fri: 06-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

8Ball & MJG
"Ridin' High [ft. Diddy]"
[2006]
★★★½

Diddy really means well in trying to get Memphis' 'Ball and G off these last years. Few artists have the kind of track record that they do, creating consistently funky, Southern bedrock gangsta shit for more than a decade on

the once-great Suave House Records. It just seemed like he was forcing the issue a bit on 2004's fairly-titled *Living Legends*.

"Ridin' High" is a bit more frenetic than their best stuff, but the lean, quick-lipped MJG and unwaveringly confident 8Ball command the chimey track. Drums tumble around, synths zoom in and out, r&b choruses candycoat the pimp talk, and the sheen is just digestible enough. Especially when it's followed by MJG's slick first verse that sees him spitting bony-- "Pour me up a shot of Seagram's Gin, let me sip THAT/ If you don't like my table manners, give my tip BACK"-- in that hoarse, aging growl. Check the wankified guitar solo on the outro, too. Just classing things up-- 'preciate that, Mr. Combs.

Stream: 8Ball & MJG: Ridin' High [ft. Diddy]
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Fri: 06-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Michael Columbia
"Dog Dog Camel"
[2006]
★★★

Chicago-based experimental rock duo Michael Columbia create what they describe as "cosmos-charged party times"-- songs that apparently exist within the hefty void between Syd Barrett and Hawkwind. While it's hard to hear either of these influences on the opening track of their new EP, "Dog Dog Camel" does find the pair skimming the genre till with magnetic abandon and coming off with a highly stylized breed of pop.

Here Dylan Ryan and David McDonnell, of Icy Demons and Bablicon/Need New Body respectively, merge a happy-go-lucky twang-- which sounds pulled from a Nintendo game-- with soupy bass lines to create a platform for layered vocal melodies, elongated blasts of saxophone, and shimmering samples sprinkled between the beats like fairy dust. Catchy and nimble, though by no means as challenging or exciting as the duo's other projects, Michael Columbia currently frolics about a kid-tested, mother-approved playground in the world of frenetic synths and joyous beats.

Stream: Michael Columbia: Dog Dog Camel
Posted by Mia Lily Clarke in indie rock on Fri: 06-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Mountain Goats
"Woke Up New"
[2006]
★★★★
After *The Sunset Tree*, John Darnielle may be done with brutally raw and cathartic abuse-memories, but he's still penning devastatingly recognizable lyrics. Here, he sings about being alone for the first time with a despondent heart and a master's eye for detail: "The first time I made coffee for myself, I made too much of it/ But I drank it all just 'cause you hate it when I let things go to waste." He's not done with warm and pristine production-gloss, and "Woke Up New" subtly layers Afropop guitar-plucks and gushy violin atop Darnielle's guitar. This isn't one of his scorched-earth bangers, and he sings it with a conversational fluidity that offsets the song's blank despair. It's a minor song, all quiet truths and delicate phrasing, and that's exactly why it leaves a lump in my throat the size of Dirk Nowitzki's Adam's apple.

MP3: The Mountain Goats: Woke Up New
Posted by Tom Breihan in indie folk on Thu: 06-22-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Busta Rhymes
"I Love My Bitch [ft. Kelis and will.i.am]"
[2006]
½

Adobe Flash Player is no longer supported

Busta's button pushers try to make their rusty robot MC appeal to both sexes and maybe aliens who were pissed the Black Eyed Peas didn't call their last album *Elephunk 2: More Phunk for Your Trunk*. The logic is impenetrable: guys love calling girls "bitches" and girls love being loved. Hence the song's title, which is repeated 33 times. To be fair, around no. 21 the phrase loses all meaning as it enters your cranial vortex and actually subtracts one and a half IQ points with each subsequent refrain. For his part, Busta does away with pedestrian rap techniques like metaphor and humor, instead concentrating on a straightforward grocery list style that's as literal as it is organized. It's very organized.

After one listen to this hellish incubus, I was ready to declare it 2006's "My Humps"-- a will.i.am production as jarringly infectious as a syphilis radio jingle and yet, somehow, much more sinister. Luckily, it looks like my prediction may be a bit off: The track will still go down as one of the most abhorrent singles of the year, but it seems to be stalling on the charts just out of Top 40 range. Let's do our best to keep it that way.

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Thu: 06-22-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Oneida Oneida
"Up With People"
[2006]
★★★★½

The shortest eight minutes of music this year start with four measures of a nondescript four-on-the-floor drumbeat that sounds like it could be coming from a neighbor's garage. It's the only thing that keeps "Up With People" anchored to the ground. No doubt, most Oneida songs want to soar, but this one approaches escape velocity. Call-and-response only begins to describe what transpires between the parts here; the relationships are more passionate, at times bordering on violent. Dolphin sonar squalls scratch the guitar's itch, a nasty chemical burn thing.

Oneida often serve vocals steeped in echo, but this song's uplifting sermon-- "Sunlight shines on the top of the trees/ The highest hills feel the sweetest breeze/ You got to get up to get free"-- is made to swim against the current, macerating in a swamp of FX. A melodic second act key change cuts the unctuousness, but only a little.

MP3: Oneida: Up With People
Posted by Sam Ubl in indie rock on Thu: 06-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jurassic 5
“Radio”
[2006]
★★
Still not biting on this. Despite the fact that J5 are now as good at their much-lambasted style of baton-passing, happy rap as possible, this one loses the plot from second one. Over a wobbly synthesizer, a screwed voice announces "Many, many moons ago, Jurassic 5 began their quest to put real hip-hop on the radio," which is just about the most arrogant conceit I can imagine. Not that rapping can't be about popping shit, but their dismissive take is as defeating as any crack rap celebrator (ahem). From there an arrestingly chimey melody-- courtesy of longtime Nas producer Salaam Remi-- dominates the track whilst the Cali five, in a real shocker, reminisce about the good old days. Tributes to the Cold Crush Brothers and Treacherous Three, duly noted. But I don't remember the part where Grandmaster Flash was a didactic moralist. For the record, there's actual music still being made today.
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Thu: 06-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Rich Boy
“Throw Some Ds”
[2006]
★★★★
Thanks again to the 1990s and Jay-Z (or was it Puff Daddy?) for reclaiming shiny materialistic excess, so that dudes like Rich Boy can comfortably shout "Get money! NEW money!" and no one finds it gauche. And anyway, this is post-capitalist capitalism: New Money from the alternate economy of D-boys, positioning the 21-year-old Alabaman Rich Boy as a modern-day Johnny Kemp-- "just got paid/ it's Friday night"-- with this track about the "fuck yeah" of the first paycheck and capital-b Balling. There's no room for hoe-love, so he says, probably because he's too busy caressing his just-bought Cadillac, which he mentions a jillion times: "throw some Ds on that bitch!" (translation: outfit that vehicle with Dayton rims.)

Rich Boy's staccato flow's exhilarated, excitable, like he was served the universe, just dropped the top, and is currently rapping into the heavens. Living large. Polow da Don, producer, consistently makes beats that sound like summer exploding (cf. his remix of Mya's "Fallen"); here, his gleaming synths and glorious hook underscore the lyrics' over-the-top swagger: "When we hit the club I'ma hit them draws/ And that's all/ Every freak should have a picture of my dick/ on they walls." An inflated, absurd eye-roller-- but then again, with that beat and hook, this freak might consider it.

MP3: Rich Boy: Throw Some Ds
Posted by Julianne Shepherd in hip hop on Thu: 06-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Danielson
“Goody Goody”
[2006]
★★★
Danielson couldn't cram all of his few dozen *Ships*-mates onto his 7" B-sides, but he did lure away a little ghost girl from a Boards of Canada album to squeak alongside his ominous, "What am I capable of?" voice. That voice stalks the song's minimalist guitar and percussion arrangement, which is all about building tension until the quick, placid end: Instead of climaxing, his fiery imagery vanishes in a shimmer, 'cause everything's okay when you have friends. It's more sinister and introspective than the bravado of *Ships*, which is great-- counterarguments are what B-sides are for. But without a satisfying destination, the section that's creeping up on you feels like little more than an eerie fragment-- and I almost don't even care how the little girl got done for.
Posted by Chris Dahlen in indie on Wed: 06-21-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fatboy Slim Fatboy Slim
“That Old Pair of Jeans”
[2006]
★★★

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Fatboy Slim is largely anonymous on this single, which is no surprise considering he's largely anonymous on many of his singles and all of his videos, preferring instead to let high-profile samples (the Who, Jim Morrison, Negativland) and guest dancers take the spotlight. But what do you expect from a DJ whose pseudonym has a pseudonym? "That Old Pair of Jeans" features Lateef the Truth Speaker delivering a suitably funky vocal about a bad break-up, and Fatboy as his backing band provides a surprisingly subdued backdrop: just some 1970s soul organ and high-hat, some gospel harmonies, and a serviceable beat.

Yeah, the groove sounds like prime Fatboy, but it also sounds a little anonymous, as if these elements have been fully absorbed into the mainstream and regurgitated in hundreds of commercials, trailers, and TV shows-- they're no longer unique to Fatboy. So maybe he's become a little unadventurous over the years, or possibly self-consciously unshowy, but it's more likely that he wants nothing more from this song than an uplifting chorus and a cheeky reply to "I Will Survive". He gets both and not much else.

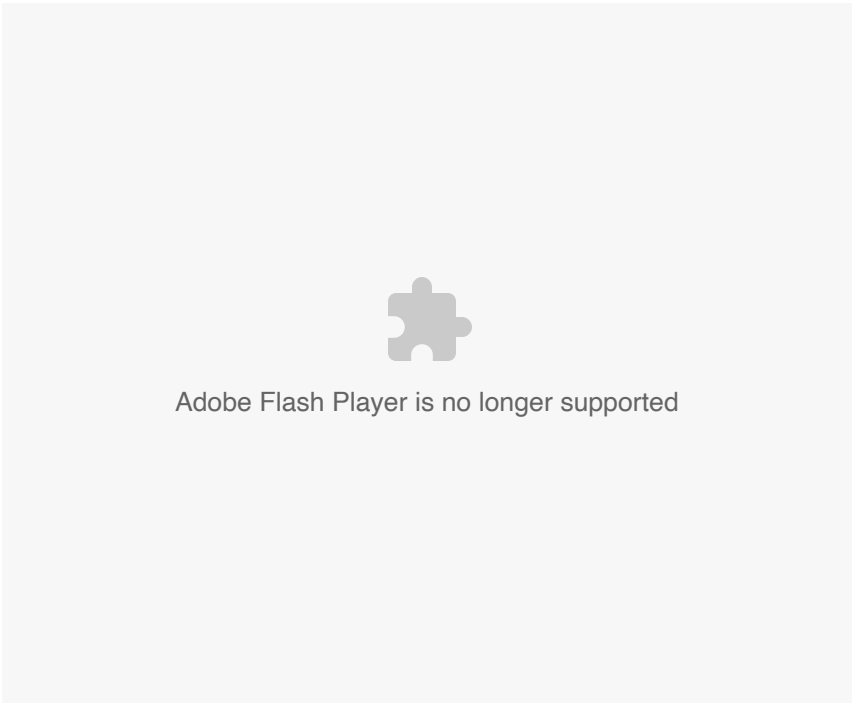
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in dance on Wed: 06-21-06: 02:29 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Broadcast Broadcast
“Illumination”
[2006]
★★★

This *Extended Play Two* track-- also the opener on Broadcast's forthcoming rarities comp-- doesn't particularly scintillate or hot dog in any way. Instead it relies on the band's time-tested low/high-register dichotomy: Fleecy cirrus clouds of synth above, mechanical churning of bass below. So, yeah, basically the audio equivalent of *Blade Runner*, with Trish Keenan's chilly coos measuring just below the average human's empathetic levels. *Tender Buttons*' "Arc of a Journey" probably made this prototype obsolete; that song's one-chord canoodling one-upping "Illumination"'s in every respect. Regardless, it's Broadcast spinning a beautiful tune out of musical antimatter-- no matter if they're stuck on the default setting.

Posted by Adam Moerder in electro pop on Wed: 06-21-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Paul Wall
“Girl”
[2006]
★★★½



It took a Chi-Lites tearjerker to get Paul "Iced-Out Teddy Bear" Wall off the diamonds-qua-illumination tip. Still he waxes materialistic in the final verse, lacing shoptalk with high school diary angst: "You ridin' shotgun in the James Bond Benz/ With the frog-eyed lens on them 20-inch rims/ So why you worried about your jealous, so-called friends?" But for the most part Wall conforms to the decidedly non-trunk rattling beat, sad fodder for a bijoux-obsessed goofball. "It started off, we were two peas in a pod/ Motivated by love and the blessings of God." Call it camp fire.

Posted by Sam Ubl in hip hop on Wed: 06-21-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bobby Previte
“Airstrip One”
[2006]
★★★★½
Holy hell, is this ever an incredible blast of good, old-fashioned jazz-rock-funk-whatever. The intro is break city, which makes perfect sense given that Previte is a drummer, and a high-caliber one at that. He's been kicking around the downtown NYC scene since the 1970s and leading his own sessions since the mid-80s. Produced with an Axelrod-ish atmosphere, "Airstrip One" almost feels like two tracks, switching after two minutes from a mixture of insane funk drums, fluttering jazz bass, and quick-strummed rock guitar into a higher gear-- where the horns come in. Previte's sax themes have an airiness to them that belie the rhythmic heaviness of the overall piece, but the way he mixes in the trumpets masterfully undercuts this melodic lightness. I'd describe it further, but I'd be wasting words-- you just have to listen to this.
Posted by Joe Tangari in jazz on Wed: 06-21-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

M. Ward
“Chinese Translation”
[2006]
★★★★
This new full-band approach suits M. Ward pretty well. His resonant croak stumbles on a totally unexpected chorus, backed by subtle harmonies on the devastating hook "What do you do with the pieces of a broken heart?" The trick, really, is that he pulls back for it rather than ramping things up to ram it home. The backporch stomp of the song supports this strategy effortlessly: Ward tops the simple acoustic strumming of the rhythm track with a fractured electric lead, lending the solo a frazzled ambience to balance the lilt of the vocal verses. "Chinese Translation" is an exercise in buoyancy, and a life preserver for the broken-hearted.

Posted by Joe Tangari in indie folk on Tue: 06-20-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Wolfmother
“Woman (Avalanches Millstream Remix)”
[2006]
★★★★

Enterprising young developers, you are out of luck: The Avalanches just renewed their lease on paradise. Or, correction: They've rolled the place up and stuffed it in their traveling remixer's valise. Now they can deploy banana daiquiri vibes at the beep of a Sidekick. "Woman" doesn't take them far-- across the Outback to fellow Aussies Wolfmother's fake-wood-paneled, plush-carpeted, 1970s-rock-pumping basement. Never mind that the dudes still live with their, ahem, wolfmom.

The Avalanches explode the original's reefer-hazed tunnel vision, disregarding its steamrolling guitar spirals and tumble-to-kick tom fills altogether. The vocal is the only recognizable lick-- and Andrew Stockdale still sounds way too much like Robert Plant. But otherwise we get melty backwater strum in place of vintage metal bombast, and a warped 808 stomp, punctuated by Beastie rap-rock guitar strikes, instead of a speed-for-the-precipice suicide surge. Round now is supposedly when winter starts creeping in down under, but I don't believe it.

Posted by Sam Ubl in glitch pop on Tue: 06-20-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Beyonce
“Deja Vu [ft. Jay-Z]”
[2006]
★★★½
It follows the blueprint. It's got horns. It's fucking called "Deja Vu". They know what's up; you know what's up. And, like nearly every summer blockbuster sequel, some of that first-time luster is lost. But we're not dealing with a *Matrix* drop-off here. Think *Ghostbusters II*-- clearly lesser yet still comfy and charming in its familiarity. Their love-- part crazy, part cool, all calculating-- will still lift you a bit higher.

For the abundance of upfront similarities, though, there are key deviations: Rich Harrison's Chi-Lites fervor is downgraded to Rodney Jerkins dinner theater r&b (replete with a chintz bassline that's straight Winwood), while this time Beyonce out-bolds the beat. And Jay, well, he sounds about the same but, in this nebulous post-retirement period, such medium-grade octane burns up quicker. It may not be the one thing summer remembers but passable JB canned heat is tough to turn down.
Stream: Beyonce: Deja Vu [ft. Jay-Z]
Posted by Ryan Dombal in r&b on Tue: 06-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dark Side of the Cop
“Shaky Little Rules”
[2006]
★★★★
This three-piece, which divides its band-time between San Francisco and southern Vermont, has one of the greatest origin-gimmicks ever sold: They began with a dream of making an electro pop album that would correlate to the film *Beverly Hills Cop* in the same way that Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* supposedly synchs with *The Wizard of Oz*. In addition to this tune's lyrical allusions to Axel Foley's badge-abusing insouciance, the bouncy synths reference the funk of Faltermeyer.

But the culture-quoting achieved by the song seems to go beyond that 1984 urban-blight-visits-sequestered-luxury smash, which was basically *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* with Miranda readings. The acoustic guitars hint at soft rockabilly, and they combine with the drum programming to suggest a cyber-sock hop. By the time Tyler Gibbons sings the words "summertime blues," you'll have a hard time believing that "Shaky Little Rules" isn't an intentional homage to Suicide, the act who pioneered digitizing Eisenhower-era aesthetics. The lyrics build from bad cop/good cop, street cop/desk cop dualities into a *Robocop* shout-out, as if giddily confirming

(via reverbed handclaps!) the suspicions of whichever guru predicted that pop would forever gnaw on itself.

MP3: Dark Side of the Cop: Shaky Little Rules
Posted by William Bowers in indie on Tue: 06-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Julie Roberts
“Men & Mascara”
[2006]
★★★★
What do men and mascara have in common? They "always run." That refrain is pure country gold, and the lyrics don't skimp on details like the "empty bottle of wine on the hardwood floor." But what really sells this song is Julie Roberts herself. She's only in her mid-twenties, but here she carries self-reflection with the weary authority of a woman in her forties, looking down a few divorces and a lot more lonely years before a make-do marriage. It's clear that she has the pipes to belt this tune loudly and ostentatiously, but thankfully her delivery is restrained and mournful, hinting at a little hope in the regret.
Video: Julie Roberts: Men & Mascara
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Tue: 06-20-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Peaches
“Boys Wanna Be Her”
[2006]
★½
I'm not repulsed by this track because Peaches is an almost 40-year-old woman rapping about sex, but rather because she sounds like a 40-year-old man rap-rocking about sex. One more fatherfucking vapid track built on flaccid electronic drumbeats and it'll be time for Miss Nisker to re-educate herself in *The Teaches of Peaches*. I commend her Title IX-like quest to abolish misogynistic epithets like "slut" and seamlessly meld gender roles into one egalitarian orgy, but here she overcompensates for her femininity. She should've just sampled "Bawitdaba" if she was aiming for asshole rap rock, and yet her faux Kid Rock riffage somehow falls even shorter. Can't say I'm surprised by this bomb considering Peaches's meteoric dive from *Teaches* to *Fatherfucker*, though she better get that groove back soon-- her biological clock's ticking.
Posted by Adam Moerder in rap rock on Mon: 06-19-06: 02:30 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

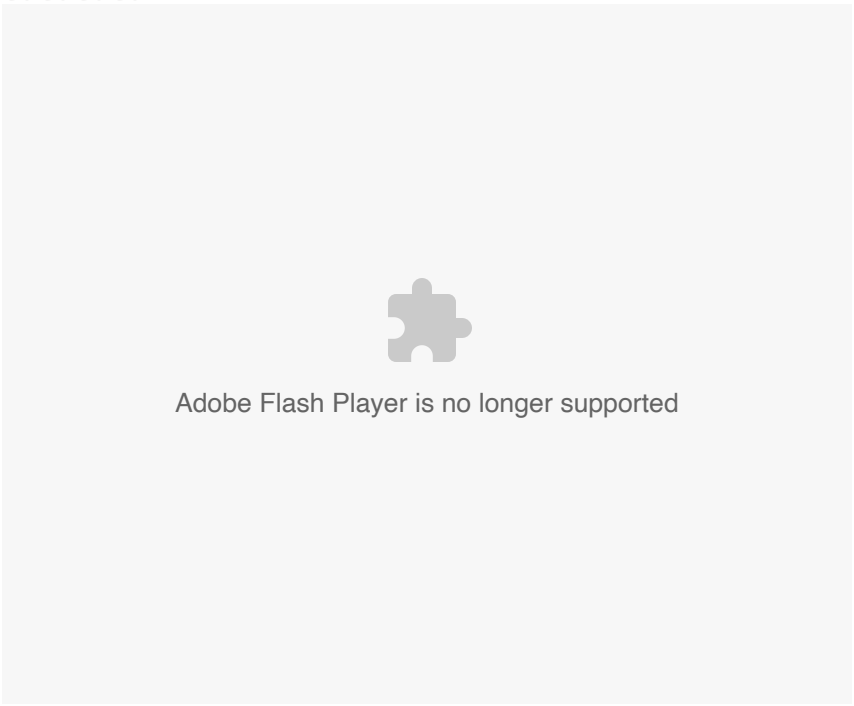
Four Tet
“Pockets”
[2006]
★★★½
More direct and danceable than his previously poppiest concession, "Smile Around the Face", you could call this by-the-numbers Four Tet-- if Kieran Hebden had ever done something by-the-numbers before. Being able to follow the bouncing ball makes this an accessible, welcome shift. After a minute of warm-up-- including a couple "Flashdance"-esque keyboard notes to hang onto and remember later-- Hebden introduces a driving, jazz-infromed drum track (just in case you forgot his Steve Reid collaborations), danceable but a bit too subtle to be the big cathartic moment. Which never comes: The headphone special effects start and the whole thing slows down and disintegrates with sounds familiar from the track's first few moments whizzing past, giving us a kaleidoscopic look back at where we started from, now seemingly miles away.
Posted by Jason Crock in electro pop on Mon: 06-19-06: 12:00 PM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bonnie "Prince" Billy
“God's Small Song”
[2006]
★★★★
Whether you like your Bonnie "Prince" Billy slick and rowdy (2004's exuberant *Bonnie "Prince" Billy Sings Greatest Palace Music*) or tiny and broken (1999's heartbreaking *I See a Darkness*), it's impossible to underestimate Will Oldham's capacity for weird, emotive howling. Here, dissonant guitar whines float Oldham's signature mewl, threading together into some kind of heavenly mess, all echo and apprehension: if there was a

soundtrack for dying, "God's Small Song" would be its standout, somehow just spare and iridescent enough to effectively tug any lingering spirit from your cooling bones. As the song putters to a close, doubled vocals and extra guitar twitters haunt-- meaning you'll want to start the heady ascent all over again. And the cycle of life rumbles on.

Posted by Amanda Petrusich in indie folk on Mon: 06-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ray Cash
“Bumpin' My Music [ft. Scarface]”
[2006]
★★★★



If you believe all the trap-talk in rap these days, it's a wonder that rappers have any time to write and record songs in between moving bricks and running from cops. So it's oddly heartening to hear a street-rap anthem about one of life's great pleasures: the joy of driving around listening to music. Cleveland newcomer Ray Cash has a cold, precise delivery, a pristine twang, and, perhaps most importantly, good taste: UGK, 2Pac, Too $hort, Devin the Dude, Mary J. Blige, Usher-- "I damn near cried the day Rick James died/ See, that shit was cold-blooded, but the music keep bumpin'." Houston legend Scarface, every Southern rapper's single biggest influence, shows up on the last verse to rep for his own influences: "I'm on some Chuck D shit with P.E./ Six in the mornin', I hustle with Ice-T." And the beat gives all this rampant sentimentality a fierce, simplistic bed: wormy, gurgley keyboards and synthetic royal horns. Understated magic.

Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Mon: 06-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Goat Dance
“Sizzle”
[2006]
★★★½

A side of goat with your drink? UK [ILM alert] "beardo" [/ILM alert] kingpin Dean Meredith, on loan from Chicken Lips and White Light Circus, plays and/or produces slow, funky, not-necessarily-Italo-cized disco that goes like fries with a cosmic sandwich and a DFA shake. Not that this stuff doesn't have its own thing going on: drum machines sound like real drums, real guitar sounds like guitar sample, and bass line sounds like Rick James gone minimal, while Meredith looks pretty smart letting the beats run the show rather than the sound effects. If you heard a lot of Lindstrøm last year, you know the market demographic, though the sound is closer to fellow

Brits Lordy, The Emperor Machine, and Fujiya & Miyagi. Sort of spacey, semi-tight, and perfect with the right drugs and a dim light.

Posted by Dominique Leone in space disco on Mon: 06-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Gnarls Barkley
"Smiley Faces"
[2006]
★★★

After their debut single spent nine weeks at No. 1 in the UK-- the longest run at the top of the British charts in 12 years-- the Barkleys went ahead and deleted it. The move was wise-- along with the air of class and dignity accompanying "going out on top," an early retirement ideally minimizes endless overplays, keeps the track from an inevitable slow tumble and focuses attention on this new bit of Danger Mouse funk from the (apparent) future.

The scrawny rodent has a gift for neutralizing hip-hop and r&b with an injection of nebulous newness that sounds like manna to critics and teenyboppers alike. It's a dubious calling card, but he does hit now and then. Here, the Boba Fett laser blasts splattering above the Motown backbeat and Cee-Lo's choice vocal are superfluous, but they're thankfully kept to the edges of the mix. "Smiley Faces" is hardly nuts or insane or even bonkers, but it has a camera-ready grin that should keep the world's silly costume shops in business for at least a few more months.

Posted by Ryan Dombal in r&b on Fri: 06-16-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Sambassadeur
"Kate"
[2006]
★★★★

Relax, my fellow Americans: Sambassadeur aren't as French as their Gainsbourg-referencing name implies. They're Swedish, and singer/guitarist Anna Persson's understated coo is so similar to Cardigans singer and fellow Swede Nina Persson's, it's as if they're the same persson, ah, person. "Kate" is a sunny-day sailing song, not yacht-rock but confectioner's twee, with chirpy acoustic guitars, strings, and a beat that's sure to set polka-dot dresses careening wildly, oh my. Singer/guitarist Daniel Permbo offers his own, equally understated everygeek commiserations. It took a few listens, but I figured out what it reminds me of: the plink-a-dink electric guitar riff of Modern English's "Melt With You", but with splashy hi-hats and ever-overhanging distant mist. The fog refracts rainbows, and in the multihued sunlight, cotton-candy enlightenment can be attained, or at least glimpsed. Our Persson: "Times won't last forever, don't you know."

MP3: Sambassadeur: Kate

Posted by Marc Hogan in indie pop on Fri: 06-16-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tim McGraw
"When the Stars Go Blue"
[Reprise; 2006]
★★★★

Ryan Adams' song has had a slew of bad relationships. The Corrs were way too passive-aggressive on their bland cover, Cary Pierce was clingy on his sensitive acoustic version, and the song actually had to take out a restraining order against *One Tree Hill* actors Tyler Hilton and Bethany Joy Lenz. So I'm happy that "When the Stars Go Blue" has finally found someone who'll treat it right and take care of it. Tim McGraw knows what really turns a song like this on: His delivery is strong yet sensitive, muscular but tender, and that guitar fanfare is a dozen roses for no particular reason. Serenading that woman with the "broken eyes" and the "lover's tongue," he savors the lusty physicality of Adams' words. The result is a very public declaration of affection and sweet yearning-- a country slow-jam.

Video: Tim McGraw: When The Stars Go Blue

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in country on Fri: 06-16-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dungen
“Sluta Följa Efter (Live)”
[2006]
★★
The Dungen dudes are overdue for newer tunes, however "Sluta Följa Efter", available for download via the MTV-owned Urge.com, isn't new-- it's a raw, nicely sludgy live version of *Ta Det Lugnt*'s pretty down tempo finale, the one with the scrawling feedback-guitar smoking Ira Kaplan-gentle alongside chilled piano, warm keys, panoramic drum fills, and Gustav Ejstes's perfect Swedish. As you'd expect from flute-ready psychedelic longhairs, the live take-- the last song in the set, judging from Ejstes's closing "good evening"-- is twice as long as the album version. The midsection makes like Comets on Fire before Ejstes returns to the microphone sounding especially impassioned (high on the guitar offerings?) to drop an extra verse. So a couple different angles, yes, but the original says it better via a majestic mix and a wild, firecracker exeunt. Here, the guitars don't unravel as gorgeously; plus, I can't locate a piano even with a stethoscope against my speakers. Actually, beyond giving downloaders a chance to witness the boys break a sweat, the extra three minutes don't add much besides, well, three minutes.
Posted by Brandon Stosuy in psych-rock on Thu: 06-15-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Method Man
“Yah Mean [ft. Fat Joe & Styles P]”
[2006]
★★★½
"Yah Mean" attempts to zap that sinking feeling that Mef got over magnetism more than writes for years. It's a half-victory. "New York, New York rock tube socks and Timberlands/ cuz hip-hop ain't feelin' them flip-flops-- they feminine." This isn't a veiled shot at Jay-Z-- though it sure could be-- but it is one of the more original, off-beat metaphors for the tired "Give NYC the Crown Back" campaign all these guys that haven't been eating lately are on. It also shines a light on Method Man's gift for quirky imagery. The beat, a sort of slowed down "Déjà vu (Uptown Baby)" if El-P got his hands on it, has a foot-stomping kick drum and more Big Apple rah-rahing from Joe. Styles, he of the most underrated since Mountain Dew Code Red pedigree, says why bring something back when I still haven't gone plat: "Niggas in the East wanna unite-- not me/ If you ain't sayin' I'm the best you ain't come to me right." Check plus.
Stream: Method Man: Yah Mean [ft. Fat Joe & Styles P]
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Thu: 06-15-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Roan
“Lullabee”
[2006]
★★★★
Under the name Roan, the Boxer maestro Frank Martiniq has quietly tested the limits of Areal's appetite for experiment. Too quietly: he's been dormant since releasing his debut, the "Buford T. Justice" 12", back in 2004. Now he's back with the four-track *Boskop EP*, another quirky trek into metallic experimentalism. There's a machine-like, almost industrial feel to it. Exhibit A: the strange and stunning B-side "Lullabee". Through rhythmic knots and flashes of melody, a human warmth sneaks above the orderless clanging and bleeping. It's a click-house tour de force, compelling in both its macro texture and its micro flourishes: a nervous, dense rhapsody of factory clatter that is simply too funky to be dystopian.
Stream: Roan: Lullabee
Posted by Roque Strew in electro pop on Thu: 06-15-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Junior Boys
“In the Morning [ft. Andi Tomi]”
[2006]
★★★★★

And here to quell the notion that Junior Boys caught lightning in a bottle with 2004's beloved *Last Exit* is "In The Morning", which is not only your first tip that the forthcoming *So This Is Goodbye* might be every bit as dazzling and adventurous as their debut (it is), but also, by some distance, the best thing they've ever done. Where *Last Exit* was all (post) post-coital whispers and moans, *So This Is Goodbye* is glinted with welcome salacious touches, and nowhere do we get them more clearly than here. It begins briskly, with a sawtoothed keyboard arpeggio, some *Thriller*-era vocal hiccuping, and a robust snare that rumbles like a fridge door before snapping back on itself. "Girl, the night's not over," sings Hamilton, Ontario's foremost Romo revivalist, on his way to evoking the youthful escape fantasies that ruled New Pop: "We're not getting older/ They can chase forever."

With the arpeggio, plosives and snares as its foundation, the beautiful arrangements alternate between leaning on gushingly melodic phrases and skittering counter-rhythms for support. Everything overlaps seamlessly-- the verse and the chorus blissfully interchangeable, all pushed forward by that rhythm-- up until around the three minute mark, when things swell to a sudden build and the Boys introduce a shrill firecracker synth riff that sounds like one of Lil Jon's, albeit pitched up and comically excited. As simple sonic moments go, its one of the most thrilling you'll hear this year. As for the track, same-- five minutes rarely rush by this quickly.

Posted by Mark Pytlik in electro pop on Wed: 06-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Beanie Sigel
"Why Wouldn't I"
[2006]
★★½

Seems like that whole gun-up may be an attention-getter after all. This track, released mere days after Beans was bung, is not the work of a man who just watched his life flash before him inside the black barrel of a pistol. It's barely as good as the worst bits of his 2005 opus, *The B.Coming*. That album had palpable pathos, with Sigel bypassing the gat blasting blows for an engrossing paranoid confusion. Yet "Why Wouldn't I" is the emotionless sound of any generic rap superhero with his brain clouded by inflated invincibility. And it finds him groveling before one-time mentor Jay-Z.

"Why wouldn't I be a chip off the old Roc?" he raps, as if the Roc means anything anymore. Though he originally sided with Dame in the whole Roc-A-Fella imbroglio, Beanie seems to be coming around to El Presidente's side now with an appearance at his fabled "I Declare War" show late last year and this track, which snipes Jay's flow at every opportunity. Before, Beans probably had to just tap Jay's shoulder to get his attention but now he's got to take a bullet in the shoulder. Sad.

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Wed: 06-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

My Brightest Diamond
"Something of an End"
[2006]
★★★★

Perhaps you heard her backing vocals on Sufjan Stevens' *Illinois*, or saw her on tour as part of his Michigan Militia and Illinoisemakers, but Shara Worden's full-time gig is playing the chilling chanteuse of My Brightest Diamond (née AwRY). "Something of an End" showcases a band far more darkly dramatic than you might expect from the Sufjan camp. Alternately narrating a woman's apparent descent into madness and slipping into the role herself, Worden sings, "It's beautiful and terrible!" And the music mirrors such manic desperation perfectly, as icy strings and tense guitar brood before drumming erupts in the cathartic chorus. It's Worden's piercingly affecting voice, however, that charges the song with such emotional heft. Whether it's the r's that sinisterly roll off her tongue like a snake's rattle, or the fluttering vocal coda that conjures Jeff Buckley's most delicate performances, it gives you the shivers.

Posted by John Motley in indie rock on Wed: 06-14-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

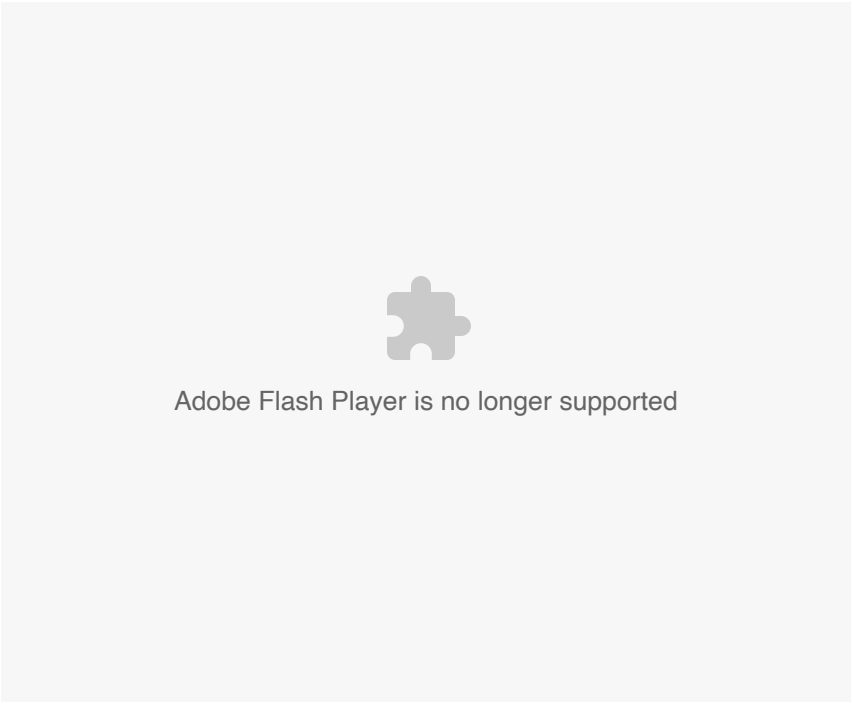
Sunset Rubdown
“Winged/Wicked Things (Live Daytrotter Session)”
[2006]
★★★★½
Spencer Krug's obsessiveness is admirable: This sweeping glam anthem in the tradition of "Stadiums and Shrines II" finds the winged lovers and oceans at the end of *Shut Up I Am Dreaming* still toppling like a two-backed Icarus. This time, though, they're embracing-- or at least having better luck grasping-- the blind struggle of life's ebb and flow. Or maybe they're heading skyward on the backs of birds, or just trying to pull something tangible from the mire? It isn't clear: Confusion and illusion are two of the track's major themes.

"Your pattern of flight is chaotic and blind/ But it's right 'cause chaos is yours and chaos is mine," yelps Krug, then spinning things around on a Bowie-powered top: "And chaos is love, and they say love is blind." Later comes "wicked" collisions shifting life's perspective, inspiring the idea that "the truth is just smoke in your eyes." Besides the opaque, but poetic lyrics and overall upward leap, this Daytrotter.com session piece benefits from the four-track, analog recording (bright/clear vocals, 1980s synthesized keyboard, decent drum sound, and nice rocker guitar flutters).

I've already tossed a shitload of praise Krug's way for his work here and in Wolf Parade, but this is further evidence of his uncanny ability to pen familiar yet totally singular, eccentric pop gems. In fact, if "Winged/Wicked Things" had shown up on *Shut Up*, it could've been the best track of the collection-- and that's saying a lot.

MP3: Sunset Rubdown: Winged/Wicked Things (Live Daytrotter Session)
Posted by Brandon Stosuy in indie rock on Tue: 06-13-06: 04:02 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Young Dro
“Shoulder Lean [ft. T.I.]”
[2006]
★★



If you're a young Atlanta rapper and you're trying to blow up these days, apparently you need to come up with a goofy dance first. Your big first single doesn't necessarily have to be about the dance, but you should definitely do it prominently in the video. The past nine months have already seen Dem Franchize Boyz, D4L, and Yung Joc ride goofy dances to mid-level fame while more talented newcomers like Maceo and Da Backwudz remain stuck in relative obscurity. So Young Dro, T.I.'s new protégé, is on some real zeitgeist-channeling shit in releasing a

song about a goofy dance and getting T.I. to wear plaid golf pants and do the dance in the video. But the T.I. affiliation means Dro has a budget to work with, and paradoxically enough, it hurts him. The beat to "Shoulder Lean" is a widescreen, slow-crawling, Southern organ-funk banger-- the sort of thing T.I. routinely murders these days-- but it doesn't have any of the synth-crackle immediacy of the snap music that other goofy dancers rely on.

To handle a track like this one, you have to actually be a good rapper, and Young Dro is not a good rapper. He talks like he's just tried to stuff as many marshmallows in his mouth as possible, and delivers lyrical gems about "my girl got a girlfriend/ Chevy blue like whirlwind." He sucks. A squeaky synth hook could've camouflaged his weaknesses, but he has no idea what to do with this beat. And T.I. could've saved the track with a verse, but instead he limits himself to the hook, which only serves as a momentary reprieve from Dro's turgid grunt. This kid needs more work.

Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Tue: 06-13-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

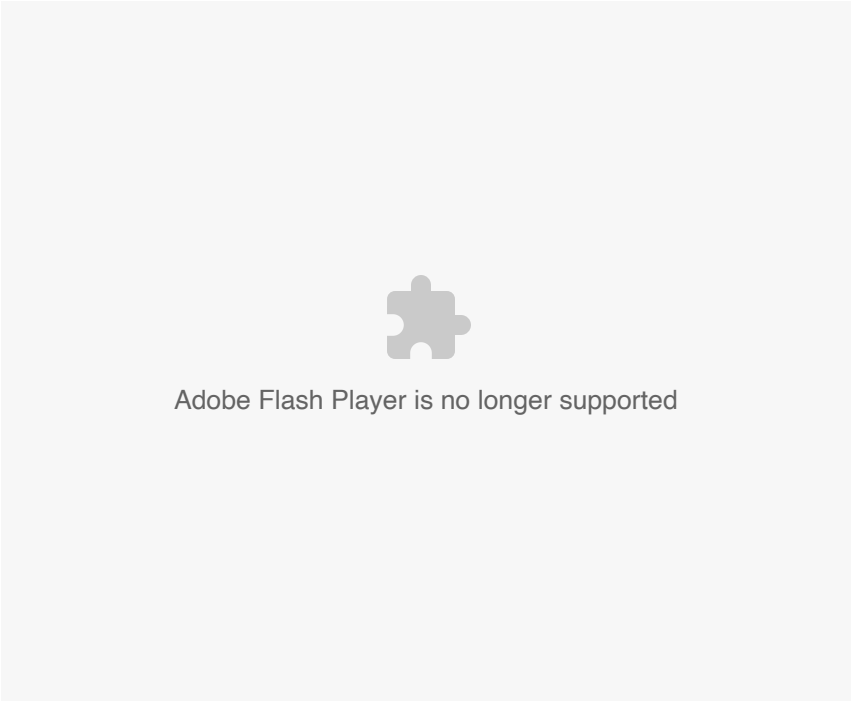
Cheb i Sabbah
“Toura Toura: The Nav Deep Remix by DJ Sandeep Kumar”
[2006]
★★★½
The Algerian-born DJ Cheb i Sabbah blends a variety of Asian, African, Indian, and Arabian traditions with modern production techniques, drawing a commonsensical line between the ceremonial trance music of ancient cultures and the stylized trance of today. On *La Kahena*, he collaborated with a variety of traditional North African musicians, recording their performances and gently reshaping them into chilled-out club music. DJ Sandeep Kumar remixes "Toura Toura" into a sinuous, understatedly hooky bhangra groove: The gruff, resonant *gnawa* singing of Brahim Elbelkani engages in an incantatory call-and-response with a chorus of female singers from Maghreb. The original's percussive *guimbri* (a sort of bass lute) is replaced by sleek electric bass and a circular string drone; handclaps are recast as burbling hand percussion; a hiccupping chant of "hey! hey!" energizes the groove without squandering its mesmeric thrust. The result is a spiritually rich dance track that's more concerned with anonymous cosmic harmony than individual hedonistic abandon, a rare commodity in today's club music.
Posted by Brian Howe in bhangra on Tue: 06-13-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Boy Least Likely To
“Faith”
[2006]
★★★½

The Boy Least Likely To Cover George Michael makes a great joke headline, but the actual event works pretty well too. The duo attacks Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou’s original with banjo, handclaps, acoustic guitar, xylophone, toys, and two-part harmonies-- and comes out smelling of roses. Removed from Michael’s ripped jeans, aviator sunglasses, slicked hair, gigantic cross earring, and Homer Simpson stubble (check YouTube if you don’t know what I’m talking about), the song loses some of its lascivious qualities and becomes sort of sweet. “Well I guess it would be nice/ if I could touch your body,” scandalous come-on for Georgie, is for these gentle lads but a shy bit of pining.

Stream: The Boy Least Likely To: Faith
Posted by Joe Tangari in indie pop on Mon: 06-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Jeannie Ortega
“Crowded [ft. Papoose]”
[2006]
★★½



Papoose is turning into one of those types who seems to be a five-year veteran after only a year-plus in the big leagues (if mix tapes, sundry guest spots, and doing a Busta on a blown-up Busta track comprise the big leagues). The name's everywhere, the potential's evident, folks are just waiting for him to breakout and finally do something, and everyone forgets that he's still a rookie. That clock's ticking, though, and it's helping nobody's cause when time's wasted on wit like: “They say you can't have your cake and eat it, too/ Tell me what's the meaning/ What's the sense of me having any cake if I can't eat it?” Don't swing for the fences when a single works just as well, Papi. But, oh yeah, this is a Jeannie Ortega track *featuring* Papoose. Not that it makes any difference. Ortega's so nondescript (in that attractive Hispanic on-the-6 way) that the Scott Storch Lite work by producer Stargate and Papoose being Papoose-- “I'm like when you double your money; I'm a prophet”-- just crowd her off the plate.

Posted by David Raposa in r&b on Mon: 06-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Brian Joseph Davis
“All You Get From Love Is 22 Love Songs”
[2006]
★★★
If you don't have the time to savor every "sha-la-la-laaa" and "whoah-oh" of tragic 1970s brother sister duo The Carpenters, and you've already played "Tunic (Song for Karen)" into the ground, this audio distillation encapsulates Richard Nixon's favorite pop band at their best in a pocket-sized digital form. Having spent a thousand rainy days and mondays forcing these soft rock ballads into compromising positions (tearing each other apart, hurting each other), sound collagist Brian Joseph Davis has taken all of the Carpenters singles that matter and made them play simultaneously, resulting in a murky, deeply psychedelic new composition that's as flavorpacked and indigestible as a bouillon cube. While Davis loops "think I'm gonna be sad" from their "Ticket to Ride" cover into a suitably self-alienated mantra for his coda, it's the immortal "Superstar" melody that keeps fighting its way through the info-blizzard, frail but tenacious.
Posted by Drew Daniel in experimental on Mon: 06-12-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Crazy Frog
“We Are the Champions (Ding a Ding Dong)”
[2006]
½
No. No, you're not. You most certainly are not the champions. In fact, if you don't put a stop to the Crazy Frog shit this instant, not only will you not be the champions, but, if we ever find any, We Americans are going to

paint Iraq's WMDs the colors of the Argentina flag, tie them to Richard Branson's balloon, and drop the whole kit and caboodle on Buckingham Palace. Seriously, sober up and take responsibility for your actions. What is this anyway? Are hooligans jumping around smacking day-glo pacifiers out of each other's mouths now? What happened to dressing in the other team's jersey and beating them to a pulp in their own stands?

I never thought I'd come across a situation that would warrant this statement, but Freddie Mercury is blushing in heaven right now, blushing because you've shamed him in front of God. God loves Queen. And if you think Diego Maradona's "Hand of..." was something to cry about, wait until the actual Hand of reaches down and Subbuteo-flicks in goal after goal after humiliating goal for every one of your group play opponents-- even Trinidad and Tobago. "God's using his hands. God cheated. God cheated." No, England, you've cheated yourself.
Posted by Peter Macia in wtf on Fri: 06-09-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Embrace
“World at Your Feet”
[2006]
½
"Hey Posh?"
"Oi."
"Of all the bands in England, who's the finest?"
"Emmm, Test Icicles."
"No, no, best active band, dearie."
"Coldplay?"
"Someone we don't swing with preferably."
"Embrace?"
"Right you are!"
"What do I win?"
"Another day with Becks."
"Yeaaaa!"
"Where are the children?"
"You mean Brooklyn, Romeo and Cruz?"
"Yes, Brooklyn, Romeo and Cruz."
"No idea."
"I think I'll write the lyrics to the Official England World Cup song, whatchafink?"
"Can I make the stuff with the things?"
"The music?"
"Yes, that."
"Why not?! We are The Beckhams!!! Hahahahahaa!!!!!!"
"Let's go eat people."
"Jolly good! Cheers to England and eating people."
Posted by Peter Macia in alternative rock on Fri: 06-09-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

British Whale
“England”
[2006]
★★★
His passion captivated MySpace. His courage inspired a nation. His heart defied a queen. One man, armed with awesome hair and silver pants, sang his country to glory, and that man's name was...Justin Hawkins. Before anything else, you need to understand that the Darkness frontman recorded this as a response to the Embrace song. Always a good look. Apparently, he believed the feelgood vibes of "World at Your Feet" were undermining England's chances-- pussifying them, so to speak-- so, in this glammy little number, he compares playing Germany in soccer to fighting the Nazis in WW2. That's the spirit!

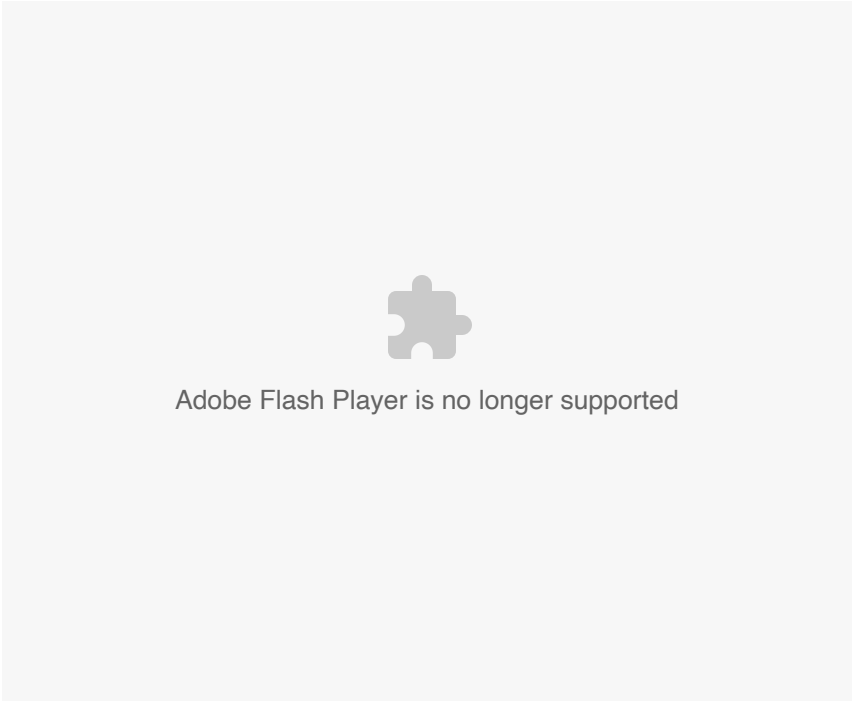
Hawkins also cheekily borrows from "Fat Bottomed Girls" (Brazil dig) with Chumbawumba-style chants (Chumbawumba dig) for what can only be described as England's best World Cup song since "E Is for England".

I don't know if England will better Sweden, but I do know that "England" is better than Swede Jörgen Elofsson's "Time of Our Lives", the Official World Cup Song. And that is saying something.
Posted by Peter Macia in pub rock on Fri: 06-09-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dizzee Rascal
“G.H.E.T.T.O.”
[2006]
★★★
A MySpace peace offering following the indefinite delay of his third album Maths and English, "G.H.E.T.T.O." finds a half-hearted Dizzee in full-on flex: "I'm G.H.E.T.T.O./ Please don't act like you don't know/ I stay tooled up when I roll/ I'm a lot of things but I'm not slow." Beyond the dark bassline, gusty horn sample, and frigid snares, there's not much to the arrangement, but instead of zipping around those empty spaces, Dizzee (who's now touring Europe with the Red Hot Chili Peppers and blogging about it) just dutifully rides the beat.

While he occasionally rouses himself out of catatonia with a tricksy turn of phrase ("Can't stop me/ Don't watch me/ Blackface Cockney/ Ever so cocky/ Trust me I'm a hustler/ Don't knock me/ Don't back down easy/ Step prop'ly"), his mental chatter hardly congeals into anything of meaning. So, an album track then? Sure hope so. That's what you get for touring with a man who won't sing it unless it ends in "-ation".
Posted by Mark Pytlik in grime on Thu: 06-08-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Da Backwudz
“I Don't Like the Look of It (Oompa)”
[2006]
★★



In case you missed the parens or the radio or the BET the past few months, this is the track with the Oompa Loompa sample. Little known fact: I actually tried to make a rap beat out of a snippet from the original Willy Wonka soundtrack five years ago. I swiped the twinkling xylophone intro to "Pure Imagination" but, of course, nobody (including me) really gives a shit about the intro to "Pure Imagination".

Then came the vastly inferior Johnny Depp remake and now this Decatur duo's getting their Grandpa Joe on. Given the conceit, though, I'm disappointed. Da Backwudz can actually rap but they only muster the most obvious confectioner connections here (candy paint, ugh). Not to say I'm only interested in superfan lyrical trifles about the original Charlie's weird comb over, but really, the track samples the Oompa Loompa song! Would it

not be prudent to at least acknowledge the possibly racist origins of these creatures? Does coupe not rhyme with Gloop?!

Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Thu: 06-08-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Team 6
“Rokkasho (Main Theme)”
[2006]
★★½
Music doesn't get any more political or timely: Ryuichi Sakamoto started the Team 6 project last month in response to a radioactive waste spill in a nuclear enrichment plant in the Japanese village Rokkasho. This single is part of Sakamoto's multi-pronged awareness campaign (website, remixes, podcasts, video, etc.) about the dangers of nuclear power in general, and the Rokkasho facility in particular. As to the single, well...did I mention that the website has essays, too? Make sure to check those out.

OK, OK: Sakamoto is still working with Fennesz, creating cavernous bits of churning drone seamed with static, a bass throb, and-- new to this collaboration-- a loping beat for MC shing02 to rap over. "We're putting our children at risk/ Data with an asterisk, call up the activists," he spits in a deadly serious tone, heavy and (lord forgive me) dull as lead. For seven minutes this goes on. Hearts are in the right place and the beat's all right, managing to convey the feeling of impending apocalypse at the hands of irresponsible technology. Were this a political blog I might have more to say.
Posted by Mark Richardson in electro on Thu: 06-08-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Morrissey
“If You Don't Like Me, Don't Look at Me”
[2006]
★★★½
False modesty has always suited Morrissey. Again and again, this charming man makes us believe he's as undesirable as we-- in clammy moments of relapsing adolescence-- fear we truly are. Dapper as ever in tux on the cover of this single, he moans, "If you don't want me/ You don't have to have me" over chase-scene acoustic guitars like those on Vauxhall's "Why Don't You Find Out for Yourself". Typical Moz: "If You Don't Like Me, Don't Look at Me" is as good as several tracks on its corresponding album.

On another level, though, it's "Moz to crits: Piss off!" If Ringleader of the Tormentors lacked the vitriol of You Are the Quarry, here the bile turns into a stylized, wordless prechorus, and a young man runs down the rushing glen. "See if I care," Morrissey stammers, of course a bit too much. The mariachi horns of "I Just Want to See the Boy Happy" return for the crashing finale, and I can't begin to parse why he sings of "somebody else who can take your gaze a ways" (not "away"). Professions of apathy aside, though, the man who once sang, "Me, without clothes?/ Well, a nation turns its back and gags" remains dashingly unrequited: "I just thought you might feel the same, that's all."
Posted by Marc Hogan in singer/songwriter on Wed: 06-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

R. Kelly
“Gorilla [ft. Fabo of D4L]”
[2006]
★★★
No stone unturned in the obvious metaphor graveyard for Robert. Monkey noises and snap shit make another vessel for the dude to do his woozy, by-now breathlessly self-referential thing-- but is it ever fun to listen to! Never a thought to racial or cultural degradation for Kelly. To conflate animal urges with broadly stroked images of animalism would require too much thought. "It's like you ice cream, girl/ And I wanna get a scoop"-- naturally a club confection, parsing would only blur matters. The word "club" actually gets mentioned at least seven times.

Fabo, to his credit, fits "laffy taffy" into his verse, which is a strict exercise in melody. A fact basically no one has mentioned? D4L's album was ripe with melody. Stretching one's voice around a beat is not something to scoff at,

though you'd never know from the endless potshots those martyrs absorb. With Timbaland back in the game and a Kelis album on the horizon, weak sauce r&b imagery gets less of a pass these days.
Posted by Sean Fennessey in r&b on Wed: 06-07-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

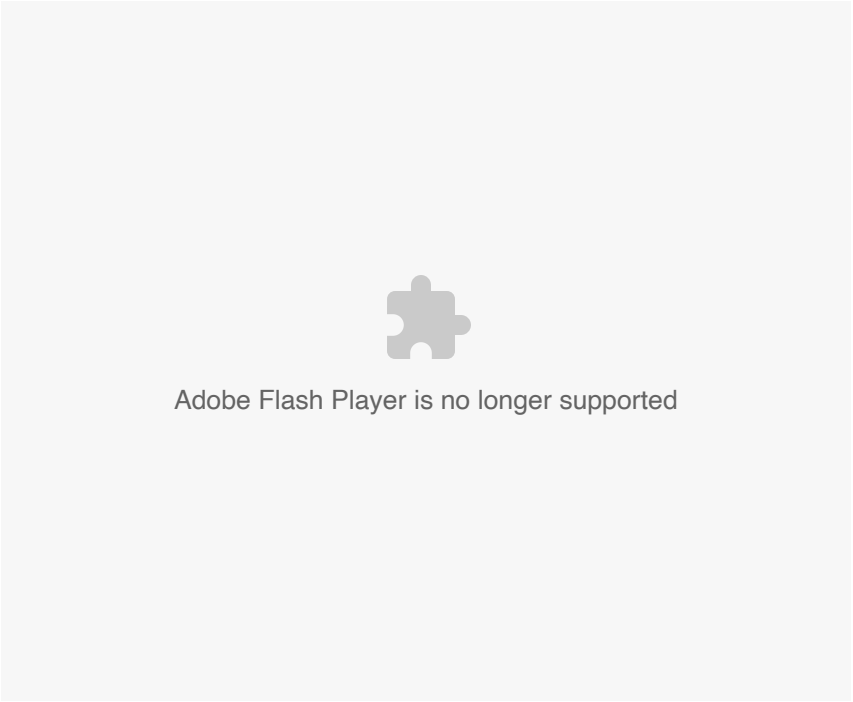
Shapes and Sizes
“Oh No, Oh Boy”
[2006]
★★★½
Typically, the songs of British Columbia's Shapes and Sizes fit into the spare and slow-building indie rock mold. And while this one begins the same way-- with Rory Seydel's brittle voice about to snap over slow strums-- it quickly snowballs into something far more massive and surging. After the plaintive intro and a sugary refrain about breaking through ice, the song drops off into a fluttering guitar phrase that's as soft and mesmerizing as falling snow. One by one, additional elements start to stick: Caila Thompson-Hannant's chilly vocals, a tinny organ, and an ominous bass line that builds from a few punctuated beats to a blackout.

As the climactic finale chugs along, Seydel sheds any pretense about emoting, singing: "The rise and fall of everything I've ever known to be true, it happened right beside me, it happened right in front of me." That overblown sentiment would sound forced into your standard indie rock package, but, for these recent Asthmatic Kitty signees, it clicks.
Posted by John Motley in experimental pop on Wed: 06-07-06: 03:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Christina Aguilera
“Ain't No Other Man”
[2006]
★★★½
A lot of people scoffed at the potential of a DJ Premier/X-Tina hook-up. Jordan Bratman-hitching is proof-positive of her questionable taste, so the decision to let Primo work on some sample-delic jams for her new album was met simultaneously by aghast hip-hop heads and pop-freak fright. Obviously, it's a damn good song. Built on a familiar horn loop and a tick quicker rhythm than Premier is used to rolling with, Aguilera's often histrionic vocals are not just curtailed, limiting showboating, but sped-up. Her strident, rap-like tone dovetails wonderfully with the beat.

Resembling Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love" more than I might have expected, the song treads some pretty obvious tropes ("You're the kinda guy a girl finds in a blue moon"), but the pop forgivability radar will likely be on high alert. Headline: Top five rap producer ever rides with pop's enduring young diva. Can you smell the guilty pleasure chatter? No need, credibility's been secured.
Posted by Sean Fennessey in pop on Tue: 06-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Muse
“Supermassive Black Hole”
[2006]
★★½



Black hole, that's pretty big. Massive black hole, bigger. But supermassive black hole? Okay, that's just ridiculous, although par for the course for hyperbolic prog trio Muse. After fashioning a career blowing OK Computer's cosmic brilliance into over-the-top space operas, the band's switched to something arguably even gawkier-- dance rock. Frontman Matthew Bellamy makes a seamless transition from Freddie Mercury-style glam vocals to Prince's sweaty soul falsetto, but the instrumentation straggles. Likely very few will cut a rug to this combination of throwaway industrial riffs and a drum machine riddled with gremlins. Sure, they're taking baby steps out of Radiohead's shadow and NME's nearly sycophantic hype sphere, but they need a better reentry plan after years of intergalactic wanderlust.

Posted by Adam Moerder in experimental rock on Tue: 06-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Remy Ma
“Feels So Good [ft. Ne-Yo]”
[2006]
★★★★
Hot as Tyra in a mink in NYC's Club Speeed, this track, built from Intimate Strangers' "Love Sounds", is ripe for Remy's flirts: "Stop acting crazy, I'ma keep it real/ See, I just need someone that gives me something I could feel/ Have a little small talk and a night on the town/ It could all be yours-- can you go another round?" Helping preserve the sexy is Ne-Yo, who in his buttery, post-Usher tenor, kicks lazy-eyed, last-call-for-liquor type lines-- ideal for both party girls and players on the prowl. Steamy and soulful, this is sure to dampen dancefloors from here to Helsinki.
Posted by Will Dukes in hip hop on Tue: 06-06-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Thom Yorke
“Black Swan”
[2006]
★★★½
Thom Yorke always thinks big, scaling glacial edifices that make open spaces claustrophobic. Solo albums, meanwhile, are often a reactionary province-- Billy Corgan goes synth-pop, Craig Wedren MOR, and everyone from Mike Ness to Amy Millan takes a stab at country. But Yorke, a certified pop music visionary, just doesn't truck with the inessential, carving in miniature the same sort of exquisite ice sculpture that Radiohead would stadium-size.

"Black Swan" glides through glassy darkness with exactly the sinister elegance its title implies, churning a

simple yet complexly overlapping turbulence in its wake. An eel-slick bass line undulates and percussion spits like steady rain, while a sinuous guitar lead intones a tight pattern of tiny chimes. Yorke sings without reverb, sounds relaxed and terrestrial and beautifully anomic, and says "fuck" a lot without making a big noise about it. Playing over the closing credits of Richard Linklater's adaptation of Philip K. Dick's A Scanner Darkly, this should make the perfect coda, a final ricochet in the director's existential billiards.
Posted by Brian Howe in electro-pop on Mon: 06-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Regina Spektor
“Fidelity”
[2006]
★★★★
At first, "Fidelity" seems to have Spektor diluting her eccentricities to appease the major-label gods, who were generous enough, after all, to deliver Soviet Kitsch. For starters, there's no piano, even though the song must've been written on Spektor's signature instrument. Second, it samples plucked strings for its tidy beat, which is bolstered by some 1990s-era Springsteenian synth washes.

But then the chorus comes around and throws everything else into sharp relief. As a real drumkit kicks in, those plucky beats transform into a quirkily minimalist melody, and her broken syllables on the chorus-- "it breaks my hea-aa-aa-aa-aa-rt"-- are immediately Spektorian, a few seconds' goofiness in a song that finds both hope and heartbreak in self-analysis.
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in singer/songwriter on Mon: 06-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ronnie Spector
“All I Want”
[2006]
★★½
On paper, this sounds mighty: The great Ronnie Spector covering the superlative Amy Rigby song. The execution, however, disappoints mightily. Aside from some of her trademark "whoah-oh"s, which are as usual sublime, Spector doesn't change the original very much at all, even mimicking Rigby's resilient phrasing. Keith Richards' guest guitarwork, meanwhile, sounds subdued and anonymous-- hey, you pulled him away from his busy schedule of falling out of palm trees, why not give him something to do? And while Ronnie invests the lyrics with an emotional authority that undoubtedly comes from experience (someone's betting you'll think of Phil when you hear this), she somehow can't match Rigby's performance, which, ironically, was deeply indebted to the Ronettes. Who saw that coming?
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in rock on Mon: 06-05-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

DJ Drama & Lil Wayne
“Sportscenter”
[2006]
★★★★
Wayne likes sports, as he attests in the intro to this track from his latest, greatest 2006 mixtape-- he's flooded the market with about one high-quality tape a month since The Carter II flew last December. This cut finds him volleying words, phrases, and flows inside his skull in search of something new. Clearly, he's playing the game because he still loves to play the game.

And the one-on-none match is a joy to hear-- if a bit disturbing. "I'm from New Orleans, nowhere near peace/ Pure beasts/ Fear free/ Dear grief," he spitballs, before playfully pulling back the free associating brain bursts: "Catch up bitch, I'm in gear three/ Zoom/ Gone/ See ya/ Peace!" He even makes an MJ reference sound fresh with the same stop-start technique: "I waited on my turn to burn, can I get a light?/ Little dog/ Bigger bite/ Jackson 5/ Little Mike." Wayne's practice pose trumps competitors' game seven gusto. You know he's going to win because he simply can't lose.
Posted by Ryan Dombal in hip hop on Fri: 06-02-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lindstrom
“Breakfast in Heaven”
[2006]
★★★½
Chorus of angels; chorus-effected beats; big, quantized arpeggios digging trenches out of the acoustic space before them and letting the rush of sparkling, metallic pixie-matter fill everything in between. Norway's Hans-Peter Lindstrøm, riding a very hot wave of remixes and his own productions throughout the dancing-robot multiverse, delivers another nice little ride, as entertaining as you could ever want it to be-- with the standard suspension of disbelief that people don't actually move through the air to, say, have breakfast in heaven. Nevertheless, this reminds me in spirit of stuff Boredoms/V8redoms ringleader eYe is doing now as the Lift Boys: making gorgeous, escapist fantasy-dance, full of detail and enough subtle variation to keep the home-listeners all hopped up. And really, when the views are this fantastic, escaping is hardly a retreat.
Posted by Dominique Leone in space disco on Fri: 06-02-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

John Vanderslice
“Exodus Damage (Alias Remix)”
[2006]
★★
John Vanderslice's narrative about a militant American's post-9/11 doubt already walks a very thin line between poignant and precocious. It didn't need any obnoxious signifiers to highlight its dramatic ambiguity. Like, for instance, some jerky quiet/loud contrast between verse and chorus. Or Alias' obnoxious DJ Shadowboxing beats replacing the original's tasteful guitar/mellotron interplay. Or Vanderslice's vocals floating tunelessly in this inert ether. The only time this remix hits its mark is when it most resembles the source text-- which means it's better to just queue up the original and let this sorry rendition tread water in the shallow end.
MP3: John Vanderslice: Exodus Damage (Alias Remix)
Posted by David Raposa in electro-pop on Fri: 06-02-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Xiu Xiu
“Boy Soprano”
[2006]
★★★
Can't truss it: people over 30, Fox News, Wikipedia, and those gazillion damn mp3 blogs. I can think of at least five homespun sites that mislabeled "Boy Soprano" (including the one that called it "Soprano Boy") as the popular, elementarily percussive concert tune during which cousin Caralee sings about her "own midnight." And now here's the official song, and it's like power pop, for Jamie Stewart, the straight man's gay man, which means that it sounds like Björk playing a defibrillatorcordion, or Depeche (operatic) Mode possessed by the Cenobites from the Hellraiser octology. The confusion's got my last.fm stats all Xiubar.

We have to hope that Stewart's not getting facile and slipping into mannered eccentricity, à la Tom Waits or "Twin Peaks". There's something crutchy about the degree to which the chorus is repeated without raising the song's dramatic stakes. I shouldn't be thinking of the New Pornographers' "Miss Teen Wordpower" while listening to Xiu Xiu, much less "Monster Mash". And chanting "yes no yes no" is a poor sugar substitute for past Stewartian paeans to ambivalence. Still, the keys range endearingly from Wagnerian to Commodore 64, climaxing in a Keith Emerson-versus-Bomb Squad solo. It'll do, for hungry fans and on goth night, but detractors will remain unconverted by this erotic/cautionary joint.
Posted by William Bowers in experimental rock on Thu: 06-01-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

James Figurine
“All the Way to China [ft. Erlend Øye]”
[2006]
★★
TamborellBro (8:39:03 PM): hey ben, when are we making another postal service record??
SweatyQT (8:39:48 PM): um, sorry jimmy, things are pretty busy with my other band right now...
TamborellBro (8:40:52 PM): :(but I thought the freckles in our eyes were mirror images and...

Auto response from SweatyQT: sorry i'm not around, guess i have other "Plans", lol
TamborellBro (8:41:49 PM): ohno, now where will i find a sensitive indie vocalist to soften my icy electronic landscapes :?
Sk8RBØye (8:42:30 PM): Hey guys, a/s/l?

And so Jimmy Tamborello (appearing as James Figurine) trades in a Death Cabbie for a King of Convenience, at least for this isolated track on the forthcoming *Mistake Mistake Mistake Mistake*. Unfortunately, Erlend Øye doesn't quite have the soppy dramatic range of his predecessor as he breathily sings about hole-digging. The fact that he's given a fairly immobile microhouse shuffle to work with-- just as the valentine synths fire up, they're clotheslined by a boring guitar interlude-- makes one wonder if Tamborello pines for his ex.

Posted by Rob Mitchum in electro-pop on Thu: 06-01-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Pimp C
“Pourin' Up [ft. Mike Jones & Bun B]”
[2006]
★★★
Far as I've heard from Carnival Beats-- producers of "Sittin' Sidewayz", "Still Tippin'", and "Draped Up", among a whole mess of incredible Houston hits-- they have yet to produce an unlikable track. "Pourin' Up" only continues the trend as the Williams brothers, Salih and Tomar, manage to fit lots of sounds into a small space without cramping the MCs. The drippy wickas-wickas, dense scratches, symphonic keyboard melody, and blunted bass line all add up to another epically coherent banger. Pimp, to his credit, hasn't changed his steez since exiting the bing. Buoyed by a sample from his memorable "Big Pimpin'" verse, he jams Lil Wayne, smokes out, and brags on his mack game.

Less dope, as usual, is Mike Jones. Repeating his verses, like he does, Jones bites Big L's once-hilarious "I don't got no love for 'em but hard dick and bubble gum" three times. Bun B bats third and cleans up fine, doing a very competent job on this quasi-reunion, but throwing Jones between the Underground Kingz on an otherwise slamming track seems a less than sage decision.
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Thu: 06-01-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: The Decemberists
“The Bandit Queen (With 'Dialogue' and 'Tap Dancing')”
B-Side: The Decemberists
“The Bandit Queen (Version Prescott)”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★½
B-Side: ★★½
Both versions of this song were included on the vinyl version of 2005's Picaresque, and are newly available for download on iTunes. The "With 'Dialogue' and 'Tap Dancing'" release is played on a creaky saloon piano and features a dance solo, while the "Version Prescott" features only an earnest acoustic guitar. The former has more flavor, although it also features an annoying intro in which Colin Meloy plays a wayfaring stranger stopping by a solemn saloon; the latter plays it safe and straightforward. The song itself is a near-perfect shanty melody, and Meloy gets in a few good lines-- especially "let me be the one to lay within your thieving arms tonight," but neither version moves beyond tossed-off trifle, which in its own way is a lot more tiresome than nine-minute maritime epics.
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie pop on Wed: 05-31-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fam-Lay
“Skrung Owt”
[2006]
★★★★½
Every now and again the Neptunes come through with something so un-catchy and devious that it manages to morph and turn into the catchiest thing in the world. "Skrung Owt" won't have the sea legs of "Grindin'" or

"Drop It Like It's Hot", however-- in part because its The Day the Earth Stood Still-style sound is not just beyond malevolent, it's damn near hateful. Fam has been a label punching bag for a while, too, so he fits snugly on this seether, without switching the approach from his 12" past. Imploring us to "say it with me, 'I got ya bitch skrung owwwt,'" this is no-bones shit, and at five minutes it's long-- but not too long. Fam isn't a technician, just a boaster, but his lazy-daze flow and impossible-to-teach confidence put him way over. And, for a moment, he helps redeem Skateboard P before the producer's album finally drops and lets everyone down.
Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Wed: 05-31-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bishop Allen
“Flight 180”
[2006]
★★★
Brooklyn's Bishop Allen used to be a really good Modest Mouse ripoff band-- see "Busted Heart" from their 2003 debut LP Charm School. On "Flight 180", from the April edition of their EP-a-month series, they're a really good Arcade Fire ripoff band. Ah, the ebb and flow of indie rock.

Occupying the same milieu as Liz Phair's "Stratford-on-Guy" (i.e., looking out an airplane window and having, like, really deep thoughts 'n stuff), "Flight 180" makes up for its lyrical shortcomings with a majestic buildup that recalls "Neighborhood #1 (Tunnels)". It begins with just a bass drum throb and feathery acoustic guitar picking, then blossoms into Philip Glass piano arpeggios, moaning violin, and, of course, those ubiquitous gang vocals. The payoff isn't as satisfying as it could be, but hey, it's been a year since we heard a note of new music from Win and Régine and co. This'll do.
Posted by Amy Phillips in indie rock on Wed: 05-31-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Animal Collective
“The Purple Bottle (Stevie Wonder Version)”
B-Side: Animal Collective
“Polly”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★★
B-Side: ★½
Animal Collective designed this ultra-limited, white-label 7", featuring no distinguishing markings, to avoid the copyright hassle. On the A, Avey Tare inserts a modified version of Steve Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You" into the bridge/breakdown at the center of live-staple "The Purple Bottle" (he'll only go as far as "to say I like you"-- these kids and their fear of commitment!). Live, it's the same mix and music from the album, with the sneaky quote serving as a nice surprise bubbling out from the comparatively noisy show-- a reminder of the group's love of pop amidst the never-ending drone-- but it works just as well in the controlled studio setting. Stevie at his cloying zenith is easily accommodated in this goofy and infectiously joyous world. That Animal Collective doesn't know sincerity from irony helps immensely.

One of Cobain's worst songs, "Polly" already has far too many versions floating around, including several painful run-throughs by the man himself. Animal Collective decide to "make it their own," retaining the acoustic guitar and voice arrangement but adding their signature rapid-strum and dynamic swell maneuver. Despite A.C.'s many virtues, here the usual complaints of the haters make all kinds of sense: The naiveté is forced, the half-hearted attempt at creepiness is empty theater, and the sound, just plain amateurish. Given its position on a way below-the-radar release, "Polly" will likely remain suitably obscure.
Posted by Mark Richardson in experimental pop on Tue: 05-30-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

El-P
“Everything Must Go”
[2006]
★★½

El-P hating usually focuses on two things: his beats and his rhymes. Too much. Too dense. No rhythm. No flow. Oh well, here you go: Party Producto. Dance around the mushroom cloud, everybody. Built on the girders of "Cold Gettin' Dumb" and reinforced with trademark synths of doom, it's not exactly House Party, but for El-P, it's about as funky as it's gonna get. That seems to be the head Jukie's new m.o., to shake off the Blade Runner-lover tag and reach new listeners who either don't remember Fantastic Damage fondly or don't remember it at all.

The ethos is the same-- subverting the mainstream, bilious disapproval-- while served over easier to digest sonics, and other Jukies are making the transition nicely. But here, the main man's effort is listless and smug. The attraction of an El-P song has always been the aggressive energy; whether brutal or obnoxious, the fun was in the vitriol. "Everything Must Go" sacrifices that fury for a feigned swagger. Yeah, he's rhyming closer to the beat, but he doesn't sound like he likes it very much.
Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Tue: 05-30-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Shit Robot
“Triumph”
[2006]
★★★★
DFA singles out the cosmic, krauty bliss rock of New York DJ Marcus Lambkin on the flip side to Shit Robot's first 12-inch for the hip dance-rock think tank. Think Cluster and Eno. Think Baldelli. Think Giorgio (of course) and Richard Pinhas (of wha?) with super, wailing synths and DFA-typical cowbell. I wanted to hate this because of the name (apparently based on a crappy James Murphy doodle), but proggy Italo like this really can't miss right now, and what's more, it will probably rock the, uh, rock clubs as much if not more than the, uh, dance ones. Guitar and harmony vocals are gravy, though the nonstop, Moogy synth patterns make sure that nothing very far removed from Germanic forward momentum makes the headlines. Steal it.
Posted by Dominique Leone in electro on Tue: 05-30-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Yo La Tengo
“Beanbag Chair”
[2006]
★★★½
I don't really know how you smash a beanbag chair (they're kinda smashed to begin with), but according to these lyrics, it's possible. This is the kind of breezy, trombone-enriched pop track Yo La Tengo excels at creating. Piano on the eighth notes, slightly fuzzy bass, simple drumming, a bucket of "la-la"'s spilled all over the chorus, and a sorta stormy bridge that threatens all the sunshine but never totally obscures it. Ira Kaplan's gentle vocal makes lines like, "I've spent my life trying to understand/ Just how my life got to where I am" go down easy. And that trombone melody is seriously great. After listening to them murder all those classics for WFMU, it's nice to hear them back at their own material, sounding carefree and full of life.
Posted by Joe Tangari in indie rock on Fri: 05-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Mr. Lif
“Washitup!”
[2006]
★★★★
Pum pum is sexy; clean pum pum is sexier. Mr. Lif is nice and furious on political metaphor, but he's no sensual Sean Paul and he knows it. So on this charming dancehall number, he goofs on seduction: Instead of encouraging us to wine on him, he literalizes Dutty Rock, begging ladies to clean up that lovestink before he goes downtown, lest his "slide whistle" run into a "glissando," if you know what I'm saying. Winking in patois, he begs, "A little water and soap/ And come along smellin' fresh, that'd be dope...I'm just talkin' that rill/ Don't wanta uh if da uh smell stale." Lif then cites examples and provides solutions-- even his sex jams are edifying! It'd be all jokes and public service announcements if his beats didn't belie a freaked-out paranoiac. As producer, Lif drops an infectiously rigid rhythm and samples a trill from a 1960s sci-fi score, perhaps, to remind us that a waft from down there might imply bigger problems than personal hygiene.
Posted by Julianne Shepherd in hip hop on Fri: 05-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dirty on Purpose
“Light Pollution”
[2006]
★★½

This track has one hell of a build-up: the first half-minute of "Light Pollution" hurtles forward on ascending, lo-fi guitars and militant snare slapping, like a teenage Sonic Youth weaving downhill on skateboards. After a few desperate flails when they can't get any higher on the fretboard, the whole thing just exhales into a lazy summer strum. I'd call it "sunny," but the fey vocals and aggressively affable melody make it more like blinding, asphalt-melting, flesh-scorching indie pop. You need to be a well-adjusted individual to handle this much pleasantry, and I'm just not sure I can take it. Underneath that lisping, there's a fuzz-drenched rocker dying to come out, but those few remnants of aggression are the soggy bottom layer of this band's Happiness Pie. I'm fucking full, thanks.

Posted by Jason Crock in indie rock on Fri: 05-26-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Franz Ferdinand
“Outsiders (Isolée Remix)”
[2006]
★★
"Outsiders" was by far my favorite track on *You Could Have It So Much Better*-- mostly due to its strong resemblance to Duran Duran, which is pretty much the measuring-stick by which I judge all music. That dance-pop quality also makes the song highly eligible for remix purposes, and Isolée's icy aesthetic would seem to make him an ideal appointee for the job of teasing out the band's inner "Rio". Instead, the remix largely neuters the Ferd's new wave swagger with a loping tempo, and it relies too much on routine disco-edit reassembly to offer any sort of provocative new context. In contrast to Max Tundra's brilliantly ADHD "Do You Want To" remix, Isolée misreads the group's tightly wound strength, and turns a promising hint at their future into a how-not-to lesson.
Posted by Rob Mitchum in tech-house on Thu: 05-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

DJ Khaled
“Grammy Family [ft. Kanye West, Consequence & John Legend]”

[2006]
★★★
Kanye's chip is colossal on what purports to be a celebration of his gold trophy run this year, but turns out to be one of the angriest songs he's ever made. Could be the company he expects to keep on Khaled's tape of clapper rappers, but it's more likely he's of that rare breed that feels more disrespected the more respect they get. Kanye's always had a touch of spoiled-kid, but when the man who decried homophobia in rap a year ago throws an unnecessary "faggot" in the verse, it's on another level. That the word stands out in one of his meanest and cleanest verses says a lot about what we expect of Kanye and probably more about the accomplishment-negating factor of a pink Polo in certain circles. But whatever, Trick Daddy's been talking about Ralph Lauren longer than he's been making conch fritters, so Kanye should relax; he's among friends.

But if Kanye's bad moods mean more grittiness of this ilk, then let's hope he has a bad year. Take "Crack Music", extract the melody, add shrieking seagulls and a bit more urgency, and you've got Mr. West's idea of fun in the Miami sun. Forget Jon Brion, this sounds more like the pre-service warm-up of a funeral organist. Shopping-bag-carrier Consequence is no star but a solid sidekick, and John Legend saves the open-shirted crooning for the award shows and just sings the gloomy hook. I don't know if this heralds a darker direction for the G.O.O.D. family, or simply stems from a particularly cranky day in the studio, but it's a smart response to the pop music that actually won the Grammys in question.

Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Thu: 05-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

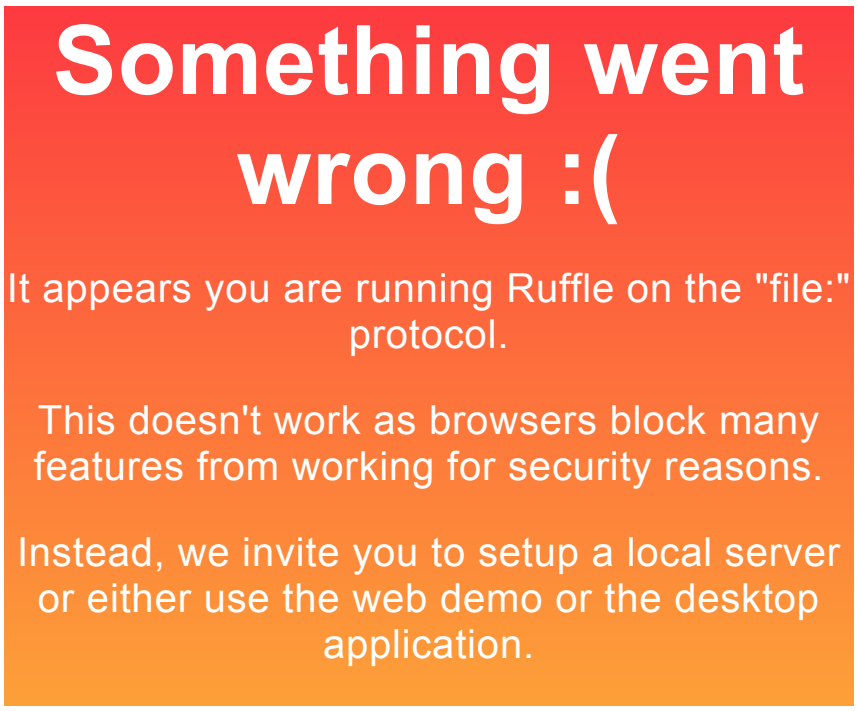
Oh No! Oh My!
“Jane Is Fat”
[2006]
★★★½
This cute little number could kickstart the "acoustic Clap Your Hands Say Yeah" hype machine for Nashville-by-way-of-Austin trio Oh No! Oh My! Like CYHSY's fare, "Jane is Fat" comes to us self-released and eager to smelt the last 15 years of indie pop into one bite-sized nugget. The Robot Ate Me's Ryland Bouchard helps pull these guys up by their bootstraps, his bargain-bin production leaving the band's slouched-on-sofa craftsmanship intact. While puckish vocals and twee-as-fuck arrangements suggest a chummy boys-next-door image, there's more askew than just the klutzy keyboard parts. Shrugging off most sunny pop conventions, these dudes manage to call a girl fat, riff on her materialism, and cap the burlesque off with "One by one/ We'll go to sleep/ And everybody's gonna be in love." I get slapped for saying that stuff-- but then again I don't bring the hooks these guys do.
Posted by Adam Moerder in indie rock on Thu: 05-25-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

PJ Harvey
“Uh Huh Her (Live)”
[2006]
★★★
According to critical consensus, 2004's *Uh Huh Her* found plush Polly Jean pining for the distorted gloom and romance of her early-90s albums. I don't know about all that. Harvey's never been especially nostalgic; her retreat from NYC ultra-polish was merely a sensible move, not an attempt to relive the glory days. But I still sympathize with those who miss the growls of her glam catsuit-ballgown era.

"Uh Huh Her"-- a previously unreleased, would-be title track-- is tailored for sentimental fans: The blown amps cut off clipped vocals, the guitars sound like contracting bellows, and the live setting approximates the dingy production of *Dry* and *4-Track Demos*. Despite the volume, it's a rich recording full of avant-blues riffs and drowsy coos. Evidently, the sunken guitars are supposed to match Harvey's ravings on valleys and depression. Regardless of one's tolerance for PJ's theatrics, there's something irresistible about hearing her scream "I drown your fears" over feedback crackles. As with many of her performances, the audience doesn't know whether to be grateful or worried.

Posted by Alex Linhardt in indie rock on Wed: 05-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Cherish
“Do It to It [ft. Sean Paul of YoungBloodZ]”
[2006]
★★★½


Something went wrong :(
It appears you are running Ruffle on the "file:" protocol.
This doesn't work as browsers block many features from working for security reasons.
Instead, we invite you to setup a local server or either use the web demo or the desktop application.

Ladies and gentlemen! While this track isn't technically a Jazze Phizzle productshizzle, he is the guy pulling Cherish's strings. Seems he misses Destiny's Child almost as much as he misses hearing "Oh" on the radio-- hence, we have producer Don Vito revisiting his previous work and making some slight tweaks. I don't know if these four girls actually equal the snap and crackle popping off of just one Ciara, but the more the merrier. And while I'd prefer to hear the better-known Sean Paul on this track, the YoungBloodZ version does a nice approximation of Luda's sticky-sweet slip-and-slide. Not exactly the perfect soundtrack for late night ATL cruising-- but if you're hanging with your crew outside the local Chick-fil-A after school, turn it up.

Posted by David Raposa in r&b on Wed: 05-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Chevreuil
“Solier Superieur [ft. Jamie Stewart]”
[2006]
★★½
"Solier Superieur" starts strong, establishing a desolate aural field that harbors plenty of hallucinatory potential. A muffled, insistent thud evokes cops at the door, or house music collapsing into one unmodulated 8-beat bleat. Four quick bars in, a compressed guitar chord doubles the clipped thrust. But that urgency is squandered as the composition dissolves into murk. Xiu Xiu's Jamie Stewart begins to mutter about "skies of difficult blue," backtracked by his own panting; his vocals are mixed low and overlap indecipherably. A cresting wave of cymbal-heavy percussion bears up stabs of increasingly distressed guitar and squiggly little blips. The track is just "off" enough to be of some interest-- the moments when the secondary beat falls out of step with weird little hiccups, and the way decorative elements gradually coagulate around the constant pulse-- but only in a "Hey, it's neat that you made this, even though I'm not sure what to do with it" kind of way.
Posted by Brian Howe in experimental rock on Wed: 05-24-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

A-Side: Sonic Youth
“Helen Lundeberg”

B-Side: Sonic Youth
“Eyeliner”
[2006]
A-Side: ★★★
B-Side: ★★★★
Surfacing alongside some key reissues, these two "lost" Sonic Youth tracks offer uncorked counterbalance to the forthcoming *Rather Ripped*'s pristine vibe. Committed to tape by the pre-Jim O'Rourke lineup, the on-edge anti-anthems, each sung by Thurston Moore in full-on "Death Valley '69" mode, are among the last tunes recorded at the band's Murray Street studio.

"Helen Lundeberg" is a cut-and-paste tribute to the "post-surrealist" titular American artist who died in 1999. The lyrics riff on her subject matter and titles of her works (e.g. "Landscape White and Orange"), turning the title of the catalogue, *Helen Lundeberg and The Illusory Landscape: Five Decades of Painting*, into manifesto. Like its flipside, "Helen" is constructed with dogged energy, and Moore's vocal lines lumber in an almost, well, painterly one word/drum/one word/drum pattern. It's less expansive than "Eyeliner", but the guitar crunch and crash in the two channels makes for a pleasant barrage of sharp sliding feedback, as if the band's creating its own dark-lit, anxious, daydream landscape and then flittering around inside it.

Built around simple, arresting riffs, "Eyeliner", meanwhile, spews self-reflective, punk sex Lower East Side poetry. (In fact, it appeared as a poem in Moore's 2004 chapbook, *Nice War*.) After opening with a one-channel noise downpour, Moore paints a romantic Bowery tableau with a waving build/release. Somewhere near the middle, the vocals take on an almost Black Sabbath intonation as he sing-shouts above a distortion brew: "Burnished hearts blind to/ Inevitable madness/ Take care of the devil, treat him with embrace/ Alive with Mary Magdalene's heart." A paean to a certain energy bouncing around pre-gentrified Manhattan-- the setting for SY's best material-- it's my favorite tune by Thurston and company in ages.

Posted by Brandon Stosuy in indie rock on Tue: 05-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dr. Octagon
“Aliens”
[2006]
★★★½
Nearly 10 years ago, Kool Keith debuted Dr. Octagon, his most fleshed out, and most celebrated, alter ego-- only to kill him off just a few years later through his persona du jour, the downtown cannibal Dr. Dooom. Most read this as Keith symbolically dumping his left-field aesthetic and its devotees. But it was a feint: He only curbed the foggy riffs on scatology to make room for sly send-ups of radio rap's thug naturalism and we-keep-it-real pretensions. Back from the dead, though, Doc Oc's returned the old twisted preoccupations to center stage.

Hence "Aliens", first single from the new LP, sandwiched between a Green Party manifesto-in-progress and a possibly Thoreauvian salvo. One Watt Sun, the Berlin trio subbing for the Automator, splits the song in two. Embellished by sinister synths, Octagon's signature horror-flick sound marks the first half, a leisurely stroll through a haunted psyche, then it careens into Tetris turntablism-- all 8-bit zaps, Moscow horns, and feral scratching. And somehow it works exceptionally well. So well we can mostly ignore the hokey conscious-rap clichés-- the graceless message-peddling (mentions of "economic liberation") and flecks of campy nostalgia (theremin ghosts, eerie Rhodes)-- and relish witnessing the Doctor at work.

Posted by Roque Strew in hip hop on Tue: 05-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

CSS
“Art Bitch”
[2006]
★★★
Untrained and it shows, CSS are tired of being sexy, maybe. Getting dealt by Sub Pop, *Cansei de Ser Sexy* is a rework from the even rawer same-titled album of Brazilian pop (sung in English) issued on TramaVirtual last

year-- there are numerous inferences to be made about the rise of carioca. But there's another, more simple contrast. "Art Bitch" is the natural corollary, little sister even, to Karen O & co.'s now five-year old (!) "Art Star". Both are feedback-drenched, both have maniacal drums, and both look to subvert commonly held themes about...well, art.

But whereas Ms. Orzalek was quite clearly taking the piss with that Shaitan death-wail and her tossed-off "I've got a gallery in New Yawwwwk" cheekiness, CSS vocalist Lovefoxxx (c'mon with that name) still seems a step away from the irony tree. Not to say she's not doing her best to lampoon artistic pretensions; every member of the group is somehow tied up in academia or design, so they get it. And while the track bangs, from the slippery synths to the wide riffs, this just isn't as funny. One thing's for sure though, Lovefoxxx's got early Karen's voracious, off-kilter sexuality going in full. Check the chorus: "Lick lick lick my art tit/ Suck my art hole." Subtlety is inoperative.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in baile funk on Tue: 05-23-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lordi
“Hard Rock Hallelujah”
[2006]
★★★½
Forget the warmed-over balladry, the clockwork choreography, the pro forma pop songs, and that middle-aged Lithuanian guy having a conniption fit. This year's Eurovision was about five controversial Finns whose couture makes Gwar look like the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers. When the group was selected to represent their country in the 51st Eurovision Song Contest, Finnish religious leaders claimed Lordi's monster-movie get-up would inspire Satanic worship. So far, so good-- the final vote tally shows that eight European countries (including Greece, the host for this year's contest) gave the group's ESL *Arockalypse* their first-place vote. The representative announcing the UK ballot even flashed some devil horns while awarding Lordi her country's vote.

That the song isn't much more than Alice Cooper's "Poison" starring Bob Rock as Moses is besides the point. A vote for Lordi was a vote for their stage show. When demon's wings rose from the back of Mr. Lordi himself, and sparks shot from the heads of his (literal) ax and the group's guitars as the angels brought that hard rock "Hallelujah!", it would have taken an act of God to keep them from the winner's circle.

Posted by David Raposa in wtf on Mon: 05-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Imogen Heap
“Hallelujah”
[2006]
★
We need another version of this Leonard Cohen chestnut like we need another reminder that dating bad boys who drink and drive can only lead to certain death, but we got both anyway last Thursday night on the season finale of "The O.C." Car-crash victim Marissa Cooper's final gasps are mirrored by Imogen Heap's heavy breathing on this a cappella cover, which seems to take not Jeff Buckley's definitive reading as its inspiration, but rather fellow Fox show "American Idol". Heap over-emotes like she's staring into Paula Abdul's soul, smothering the title word in melisma and declaring "love is not some victory march" with unwieldy gusto.

"O.C." nerds will pat themselves on the back for noticing that Season 1 ended with Buckley's "Hallelujah" and Season 2 ended with Heap's incandescent star turn "Hide and Seek", thus making this Season 3 closer a neat little synergistic trick. Everyone else will pause for a moment, wonder what happened to the cool vocoder from "Hide and Seek", and move along to "Laguna Beach".

Posted by Amy Phillips in adult alternative on Mon: 05-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Bonde do Role
“Melo do Tabaco”
[2006]

★★½
It's hard to remember now, but "Man in the Box" dropped pre-"Teen Spirit", when grunge was still just the stuff you got on your shirt from climbing trees. In mid-1991, nobody thought to attach Alice in Chains to the whole Sub Pop thing, and "Man in the Box" was just a nasty, nasty rock song, more Megadeth than Melvins. So it's a joy to hear that riff resurrected by Diplo's newest protégés, baile funk combo Bonde do Role.

Unfortunately, the Brazilians don't do much with that monstrous guitar stomp, just chopping it up and throwing some rudimentary drums and amateurishly shrill Portuguese rapping over the top. I'm sure it sounds great when you're drunk on free Sparks at 3 a.m. at a B-list celeb party, but nobody's going to be losing his eyes over this one.

Posted by Tom Breihan in baile funk on Mon: 05-22-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Roots
“Don't Feel Right [ft. Maimouna Youssef]”
[2006]
★★
Far from the creative spark ?uesto and Co. needed to regain the trust lost on *The Tipping Point*, this falls just left of center, is laced with a sharp Kool & the Gang sample, but still really drags despite the much-needed funk breakdown and flow switch-up three minutes in. Black Thought says, "This ain't a press junket and I ain't seeking responses"-- which is his problem, not ours. We can talk all day about breath control and technique, but B.T. has never been the gripping MC everyone wants him to be. His mellow, down-tuned vocal track belies all those rants about his centrality, and his verses are unmemorable and maybe inconsequential at this point.

The slophouse piano, Youssef's maddeningly repetitive chorus, and proper drums run game longer because Thought has never been the driving force of this group. Sometimes it's been Ahmir Thompson, sometimes jam band histrionics, and sometimes authentically funky hip-hop. But presupposing B.T. can catch wreck with the best is silly. Somebody needs to go wake Malik B up.

Posted by Sean Fennessey in hip hop on Fri: 05-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Goldfrapp
“Fly Me Away (Ladytron Remix)”
[2006]
★★★
More a forcible drowning than a remix, Ladytron's take on "Fly Me Away" submerges its punchy mix in a sea of fuzzy synth pads and swirling atmospherics, changing its shape from contoured electro to a sort of pressurized, M83-style soup. In contrast to the original, Alison Goldfrapp's vocal sounds removed, as if being delivered from behind a duvet; come to think of it, the whole remix sounds like that, compressed to hell and distant, like a fifth generation cassette dub without the crackle. With all that extra headroom, you'd think Ladytron might try to blow something up. In the end, however, they don't turn the warm jets past seven-- making for a pleasant but pedestrian translation that's neither more dynamic nor transcendent than its source material.
Posted by Mark Pytlik in electro-pop on Fri: 05-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Circle
“Earthworm”
[2006]
★★★
If the cryptic phrase "NWOFHM" written under the CD tray doesn't immediately spell out New Wave Of Finnish Heavy Metal to you, then maybe you're not the target audience here. For a band who I had previously pigeonholed as krauty purveyors of Can-with-newer-synths motorik pulse music, Circle are now sounding an awful lot like an artier Judas Priest. Not content with having blown minds and taken names at ArthurFest, they've hooked up with guest vocalist Bruce Duff (of L.A.'s Jesters of Destiny and übergoths 45 Grave) and have made some extremely attention-seeking metal with screaming vocals ("feel that whip cross your back"), freakish

breakdowns, and spiraling church organs in the distance. If this is what happens when Finnish people go to Hollywood to write a song about "bad boys from New Orleans," I want to bestow some frequent flyer miles and keep them in circulation.
Posted by Drew Daniel in metal on Fri: 05-19-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Sigur Rós
“Ófriður”
[2006]
★★
In the context of the Sigur Rós sonic continuum, this B-side lies closer to the "fall into deadly cold waters and then watch helplessly as the ice above you refreezes" silent-depression end than the "cure cancer, safely disarm all nuclear weapons, and invent an eco-friendly oil alternative in one day while still having time to make your sweetheart dinner" ceaseless-triumph end. It's everything you'd expect from a Sigur Rós flip: humble, ethereal, quaint, string-laden. It's pretty in a fairly pedestrian way, like Julia Stiles.

This scares me, especially after viewing a "photostream"-- basically a glorified internet slideshow-- the band set up so fans can post and view their own pictures alongside other fans' pictures while a Sigur Rós song plays in the background. To me, this highly democratic gesture is sweet in theory yet ultimately destructive.

Lacking in specificity and excelling in vague mood, Sigur Rós' music is a particularly great vessel for listeners to project their own life experiences upon, transforming them into magnificent events. Yet, put simply, the music loses all impact when attached to strangers' photos of a ketchup heart on a hamburger bun or a bunch of douchebags giving the peace sign. And "Ófriður", meanwhile, isn't that great of a life soundtrack for anybody because it just kind of sits there.

Posted by Ryan Dombal in space rock on Thu: 05-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lil Jon
“Snap Yo Fingers [ft. E-40 & Sean Paul of YoungBloodZ]”
[2006]
★½
Jon's outta ideas. It seemed "Tell Me When To Go" signaled some sort of renaissance-- a redemption, even-- for the keyboard-molesting producer. The spare, unfiltered brilliance of that quasi-hyphy track could have led to a deeper exploration of his ability to exploit and organize simple noises without abusing them. Turns out the entrée to Jon's first album since the patchy *Crunk Juice* is that same ol' shit: high-pitched Korg Triton presets, trend-humping (in this case, snap music), memorable-if-ripped-off chants, and guest stars to prop up the fact that he's not actually a rapper but rather just a host. Revivalist E-40 and Sean Paul fill in the blanks with suitable, uninspired verses. Little doubt this song is going to pop because it finds a way to combine, wait for it...snap and crunk. But really, fuck a sub-genre, if it's wack, it's wack.
Posted by Sean Fennessey in crunk on Thu: 05-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Tam
“No Cars Go”
[2006]
★★★½
Quite frankly, I was expecting a little irony: Tam's a New York-based indie singer/songwriter with 16 years in the music biz and a debut coming out in June, and the Arcade Fire...everybody knows who they are. Instead of a pisstake, Tam's reading of this track off the Montreal critics' babes' debut EP sounds just as invested in the lyrics, melodies, and meanings as Win himself-- suggesting the choice in material has less to do with getting attention than simply singing a good song. She delivers the melody in an artfully flat voice, as mussed and nonchalant as bedhead, and the sound is epically minimal-- just her, a guitar, and some drums. Instead of a rallying cry, she makes the song a lullaby for those dark minutes "between the click of the light and the start of a dream."
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in indie rock on Thu: 05-18-06: 04:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Wilco
“Is That the Thanks I Get (Live on Late Night with Conan O'Brien)”
[2006]
★★★
Rocketing out of their precociously pioneering phase, Wilco find themselves right back where they started. Sure, "Is That the Thanks I Get" would have fit well enough on a warmer *A Ghost Is Born*, but really this belongs on an artier *A.M.*. It's a modest country-soul number-- a breeze of a pop song-- but they play it like they've realized that pushing the envelope just isn't all that much fun. They sound professional, Jeff Tweedy still writes notes he can't hit, and the real surprise comes at the end: The band that once thanked its audience for "nothing, nothing, NOTHING" now wants to lead them in a singalong. Audience participation is the new Jim O'Rourke.
Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in alternative rock on Wed: 05-17-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

T.I.
“King Back”
[2006]
★★★★★
Everybody bluffs. The trick, as the old folks say, is to live long enough to turn your young bluffs to truths. Word life. Since falsely claiming kingship on his so-so debut (2001's *I'm Serious*), T.I., 26, has done a whole lot of living. And now, having endured it all, from rap beefs to jail time, the ATL manchild is wiser, more confident, and, as evidenced by "King Back", ready to claim his throne.

"I'm number one on the list," spits Tip, half-indignant. His swagger's big and easy, like he's got nothing to prove. Equally audacious is the Just Blaze backdrop, where sparkly synths pop off like hot balls of air. By the time the horns settle in, the scenery is set: T.I., boy-king, rolls through like Jaffe Joffer, rose petals in tow. This is the moment everything has prepared him for-- aren't we, like, supposed to say hosanna or something?

Posted by Will Dukes in hip hop on Wed: 05-17-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Loka
“Tabernacle Part 1”
[2006]
★★★
The word "tabernacle" has multiple meanings: the vessel that carried the Ark of the Covenant across the desert; a consecrated container for the Eucharist; a general place of worship. What binds them together is the idea that humans need tangible architecture to access ephemeral holiness, architecture that is conducive to a prayerful state, even a secular one. My bookshelf is no more just a place to store books than an altar is a place to store the Virgin Mary, or than Loka's gilt and vaulted electro-jazz is a place to store notes.

Their tabernacle is built on a foundation of insistently flickering delay inlaid with whorls of marbled percussion, pinioned by thick pillars of bass, and lined with an arras of synthetic strings that soar up and vanish in a transom's bright washout. Like all divine architecture, it's engineered on an imposing and inhuman scale, a general sort of tabernacle-- not a place to display a holy relic, but a place to enter into and become one.

Posted by Brian Howe in jazz on Wed: 05-17-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

The Knife
“We Share Our Mothers' Health (Trentemøller Remix)”
[2006]
★★★
I hope you remembered to give your mom the remix she deserves on Sunday. I know I did, but I should have gotten Trentem�ller to do it as mine always come out warm and loving and totally not right for the peaks. "We Share Our Mothers' Health" is the Knife's Karin Dreijer-Andersson's second go-round with the Danish electro-house producer Anders "I'm so hot I don't even need to renew my web domain" Trentem�ller, having splashed down last year on his remix of R�yksopp's "What Else Is There?". This time, he pulls out more tricks, but

doesn't quite nail the dynamics. Which is to say: If you want to maintain a pretty good time, ride out the greater part of this tune, just don't expect it to explode (or even better, suddenly implode like the vocal cut-up in "What Else"). Not bad, but should have been more than a contender.
Posted by Dominique Leone in electro on Tue: 05-16-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Frank Black
“Fitzgerald”
[2006]
★★★½
Frank Black has passed through the *Honeycomb*, and he is never coming back (expect for the Pixies reunion, of course). Where last year's effort found him working with legendary Memphis session men, this one teams him with them and other musicians from all over the world, including Levon Helm, P.F. Sloan, and Al Kooper to Cheap Trick's Tom Petersson and Bad Company's Simon Kirke. The classic session feeling works a little better this time out, and "Fitzgerald" feels as natural as anything he's done in years. Part of it is that he lets his eccentric songwriting personality through in lyrics like "living hammered is always hit or miss" and "your love shone through your cigarette-stained beard." Musically, Frank grounds sturdy Southern soul on a solid backbeat and pocket-bound drumming, with understated piano outlining the chords. It's certainly nowhere near as expressive or distinctive as his best work, solo or with the Pixies, but at least Black's not wasting the time he's spending in the studio with his heroes.
Posted by Joe Tangari in indie rock on Tue: 05-16-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Fugees
“Wanna Be”
[2006]
★★★
This is more like it: 'Clef, L-Boogie, and What's-his-face return, after that greasy-ass first single-- if we say its name it might appear!-- with a rootsy tune that chances at recapturing the humanist vibes of 1996's *The Score*. Don't get it twisted: This is no "Fu-Gee-La" (Lauryn's flow, as has been the case with her recent material, is muddled; the beat, a rehash of Larry Smith's "Orange Krush", sounds dated). You can't, however, front on Ms. Hill's hook, which, along with 'Clef's conscious quips, is both passionate and poppy. I could be wrong but I don't think this sucks.
Posted by Will Dukes in hip hop on Tue: 05-16-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Lovestink
“Gangsta Boogie”
[2006]
★★★½
Even if you dance like Elaine Benes, "Gangsta Boogie"-- a horn-heavy jam about self-expression-- is for you. "We got a dance called the be yo'self," sings Plantlife's Jack Splash, ensuring that, in a club setting, uniqueness is golden. Providing further encouragement is Cee-Lo, who, in his velvet-lined lisp, spits carefree couplets: "And it can heal/ You just can't stand still/ Just hearing this is like an out-of-body experience/ And I'll uplift you/ And now you got the gift, too/ For all days, may it always be with you." The track-- all handclaps and wild-eyed yelps-- is fittingly frantic. Lean wit it, rock wit it, whatever. Do you, son.
Posted by Will Dukes in hip hop on Mon: 05-15-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Chromatics
“Nite”
[2006]
★★★★½
I never really went for the glazed, monotone fishlipping that passed for singing during the whole electroclash thing; I guess I never understood what was supposed to be so interesting about somebody else seeming so bored. On paper, "Nite" looks like my Everest. Over a two-note bassline and a skeletal rhythmic intro, it has singer Lena Okazaki singing in such dead-eyed, narcotized tones that an Anna Nicole Smith cover would probably still sound

like the work of 10 Diana Rosses in comparison. But Okazaki takes the whole comatose switchboard operator schtick so far beyond the point of parody it becomes hypnotic again.

"How did mu-sic be-gin?" she drawls, cool as an IV drip. "Did it come froooooooooom/ The wind?/ Bran-ches mar-ching in the night/ Ag-ainst the skin?" Taking its cue from that opening line, the arrangement starts to bust out of quantized purgatory with a slow parade of synth baubles, double rhythms, and meandering melodic fills, and by the end of its six minutes, "Nite" has metamorphosed from a feeble electro track into a robust Italo ballad. That's when we get what Okazaki's really on about here: evolution. Question is, from what side of it is she meant to be singing?

Posted by Mark Pytlik in electro on Mon: 05-15-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Field Mob
“So What [ft. Ciara]”
[2006]
★★½
Never mind that if I hear one more sine wave out of Jazze Pha I might go on a multi-state killing spree-- Ciara just sounds beleaguered this time out. Positively numb in the extremities compared to "Goodies", "1, 2 Step", and "Oh"-- and downtrodden even next to mixtape stowaway "Insecure"-- "So What"'s redemption is its hook, a wispy, drawn-out dyad held in place by Pha's "whoo-oo"s (not a sine wave but close). The wistfulness is an about face from Ciara's usual dancefloor deadlifts. In other words, this song will not be popular. Tagging Peach State duo Field Mob is a good look for flashy, A-list superstars looking to secure a quirkier kind of hit (cf. Ludacris' earth-splitting "Georgia"), but this track does none of its collaborators justice. On a positive note, repeat efforts at mental recall have brought me, rapturously, back to "I'm Sprung".
Posted by Sam Ubl in hip hop on Mon: 05-15-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Matthew Friedberger
“Ruth Versus Rachel”
[2006]
★★★½
No surprise that Matty F.'s solo work sounds a lot like the keyboard fantasias of the Fiery Furnaces; after all, he's widely reported to be the sort of control-freak multi-instrument wizard in the brother-sister duo. Without the gravitational force of a collaborator, you might expect Friedberger's ambitious impulses to go even more extra-orbital, but "Ruth Versus Rachel" is a relatively uncluttered reminder of his unique ear for pop. The usual gang of synthesizers layers melody over the song's galloping beat, but the lead role goes to a string emulator new to his arsenal, lending the song ventilation that his dense compositions occasionally lack. Nevertheless, Little Sis' absence is felt in the low-mixed vocals, with Matt's sloppy Midwestern cockney drowned out by his battalion of toys.
Posted by Rob Mitchum in indie rock on Fri: 05-12-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Ak'Sent
“Zingy [ft. Beenie Man]”
[2006]
★★½
Post-Fergie, post-Pussycat Dolls, we're going to be getting a lot more stuff like this: Bouncy dancefloor pop-rap from extraordinarily cute and brash female rappers, the sort of stuff that comes up through teen-movie soundtracks rather than mixtapes. "Zingy" fits the bill perfectly: Sleekly chunky, off-kilter, half-dancehall beat, superfluous Beenie Man appearance (he's there to add cred and spit some gibberish on the chorus, not to give a verse or anything), lyrics that reference designer labels, spunky-hard rapping-- Fannypack minus irony, maybe. Ak'Sent sounds something like Lil' Kim if she'd grown up with a swimming pool in her backyard, going for hard and ending up huffy. The lyrics leave something to be desired ("Me and my ladies put it down in the worst way/ Hey, and we know how to par-tay"), but they're delivered with sass and verve. Not exactly bad, although Crime Mob's Diamond and Princess would eat her for breakfast.

Posted by Tom Breihan in hip hop on Fri: 05-12-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Hayley Taylor
“What Matters Most”
[2006]
★★★

What matters most: love. That's L.A. folk singer Hayley Taylor's big revelation on her quietly demonstrative song, which is minimally produced by AJ Mogis to recall his brother Mike's work with Bright Eyes circa *Oh Holy Fools*. She meets him halfway, though, shaping her vocals into a graceful vibrato and writing lyrics and melodies that I mistook for a cover of Oberst's "Oh, You Are the Roots that Sleep blah blah blah" ("the child waving who turned into a ghost," she sings, "the boy who took the bus down the West Coast...for love"). For Taylor the primacy of love is a genuine epiphany, whereas most Bright Eyes tracks build from this fundamental pop-song idea. "What Matters Most" sounds like it represents only a kernel of a larger struggle, which makes Taylor sound all the more uncertain, overwhelmed, and refreshingly unassuming.

Posted by Stephen M. Deusner in folk on Fri: 05-12-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Radiohead
“Arpeggi (Live in Copenhagen)”
[2006]
★★★★

If you're waiting for these guys to finally fuck-up something royal, keep waiting. They're unbacklashable, especially when radiating loving nightmares like this for the salivating masses selling toes for tickets on eBay. Originally debuted last year by Thom Yorke, Jonny Greenwood, and the Nazareth Orchestra (and 'forked here), this new full-band version of what is sure to be a highlight from their upcoming seventh album demonstrates how these five fellows can completely recast a song while preserving its crucial core. With the orchestra, "Arpeggi" was a hushed, daedal ordeal; Greenwood plinking a cyclical electric keyboard line while the precise strings sifted through myriad peaks and plummets, never overtaking an astounding Yorke vocal. Now, things are less "Motion Picture Soundtrack" and more "There There", with swift drums sweeping past Yorke's willowing lead and Greenwood's refrain, resurrected as a wet guitar fog.

The new version is pure Radiohead forward-jangle, from the dire, watery themes-- which recall "Pyramid Song" and "In Limbo", among others-- to Ed O'Brien's back-up vocals, which once again prove to be the band's most consistent secret weapon. A far crackle from the electro-shock riffage of yore, "Arpeggi" relies on a rumbling subtlety to build. Just as the song seems to be heading full-tilt toward a triumphant skinny-spastic Greenwood solo, it disperses into an extended outro with Yorke longing for "escape." Thankfully, there is none.

Posted by Ryan Dombal in experimental rock on Thu: 05-11-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Uusitalo
“Paskaa Musaa”
[2006]
★★½

Neither the high road of cosmopolitan hyper-smooth surfaces (his work as Luomo circa *The Present Lover*), nor the low road of bottomless, trippy fog (his work as Vladislav Delay circa *Anima*), this latest missive from Sasu Ripatti seems content with running in place within a grid of functionally tight, surprisingly "techno" sequences windowdressed with distant, Echoplex watercolors. As ever, the funk is in the details (a reversed hi-hat just before the one, a thuggish snare that tumbles like a misplaced bowling ball in the dryer). But these are familiar textures, cozy as slippers, and he knows it, so the title is a pre-emptive *coup de gr*[illegible]*ce*: it translates to "Shitty Music". Ouch.

Posted by Drew Daniel in electro on Thu: 05-11-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

Dre
“Chevy Ridin' High [ft. Rick Ross]”
[2006]

★
Does anyone remember horror-core, that moment in hip-hop history when RZA and Prince Paul, among others, decided to take a satirical stab at gangster rap, extending the fantasy to its logical conclusion of outright sadism? Corny splatter-movie organ samples, ripping spines out, mixing coke with dead rappers' ashes in an empty bottle and throwing it in the River Styx, etc. Funny shit. Overwhelming commercial failure.

Spooky fade to 10 years later, and the prophecy is being fulfilled. Still pretty funny, only now it's selling. Cue "Chevy Ridin' Hot", a Cool & Dre-produced monster mash dedicated to Rick Ross' GM mystery machine. Over C & D's howling synths and hollow Mannie Fresh rolls, Ross declares immediately he's a "real thug," which is why his "rims scrub," because thugs like big wheels. Further, he's "got a V12/ Sweeter than a female/ It feels like intercourse/ Bucklin' the seatbelt." I checked, General Motors doesn't make a V12, but this line works on two fronts. Converting to a V12 is time-consuming; many hours spent in the garage means no time for the ladies. Also, a lot of people don't wear seatbelts, but they should because sometimes it feels really good to play it safe.

Dre spits a hook and two congested verses about morgues before Ross returns with a bevy of clichéd new-money slogans. By the time "Chevy" rolls to a stop, it feels like you've been screwed out of a dollar on one of those haunted house rides with homeless guys in Dracula outfits.

Posted by Peter Macia in hip hop on Thu: 05-11-06: 12:00 AM CDT | Digg this article | Add to del.icio.us | Permalink

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1. **Radiohead** *In Rainbows [CD 2]*
2. **Vampire Weekend** *Vampire Weekend*
3. **Radiohead** *In Rainbows*
4. **Rivers Cuomo** *Alone: The Home Recordings of Rivers Cuomo*
5. **Wu-Tang Clan** *8 Diagrams*
6. **Jonny Greenwood** *There Will Be Blood OST*
7. **The Mars Volta** *The Bedlam in Goliath*
8. **Cat Power** *Jukebox*
9. **The Magnetic Fields** *Distortion*
10. **Times New Viking** *Rip It Off*
11. **Hot Chip** *Made in the Dark*
12. **Daft Punk** *Alive 2007*
13. **Beck** *Odelay: Deluxe Edition*
14. **Michael Jackson** *Thriller: 25th Anniversary Edition*
15. **British Sea Power** *Do You Like Rock Music?*
16. **Burial** *Untrue*
17. **Atlas Sound** *Let the Blind Lead Those Who Can See But*
18. **The Simpsons** *Testify*
19. **Pink Floyd** *Oh, By the Way*

20. **Beach House** *Devotion*
21. **High Places** *03/07 – 09/07*
22. **Interpol** *Live*
23. **Ghostface Killah** *The Big Doe Rehab*
24. **Andrew Bird** *Soldier On EP*
25. **Black Mountain** *In the Future*
26. **Xiu Xiu** *Women as Lovers*
27. **El Guincho** *Alegranza!*
28. **Lupe Fiasco** *The Cool*
29. **The Mountain Goats** *Heretic Pride*
30. **Nine Inch Nails** *Y34RZ3R0R3M1X3D*
31. **Fleet Foxes** *Sun Giant EP*
32. **Drive-By Truckers** *Brighter Than Creation's Dark*
33. **Goldfrapp** *Seventh Tree*
34. **Morrissey** *Greatest Hits*
35. **Stephen Malkmus & the Jicks** *Real Emotional Trash*
36. **The Raveonettes** *Lust Lust Lust*
37. **Los Campesinos!** *Hold on Now, Youngster...*
38. **Jason Collett** *Here's to Being Here*
39. **Jet** *Shine On*
40. **The Honeydrips** *Here Comes the Future*

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